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ARGOSY

SEPT. 14

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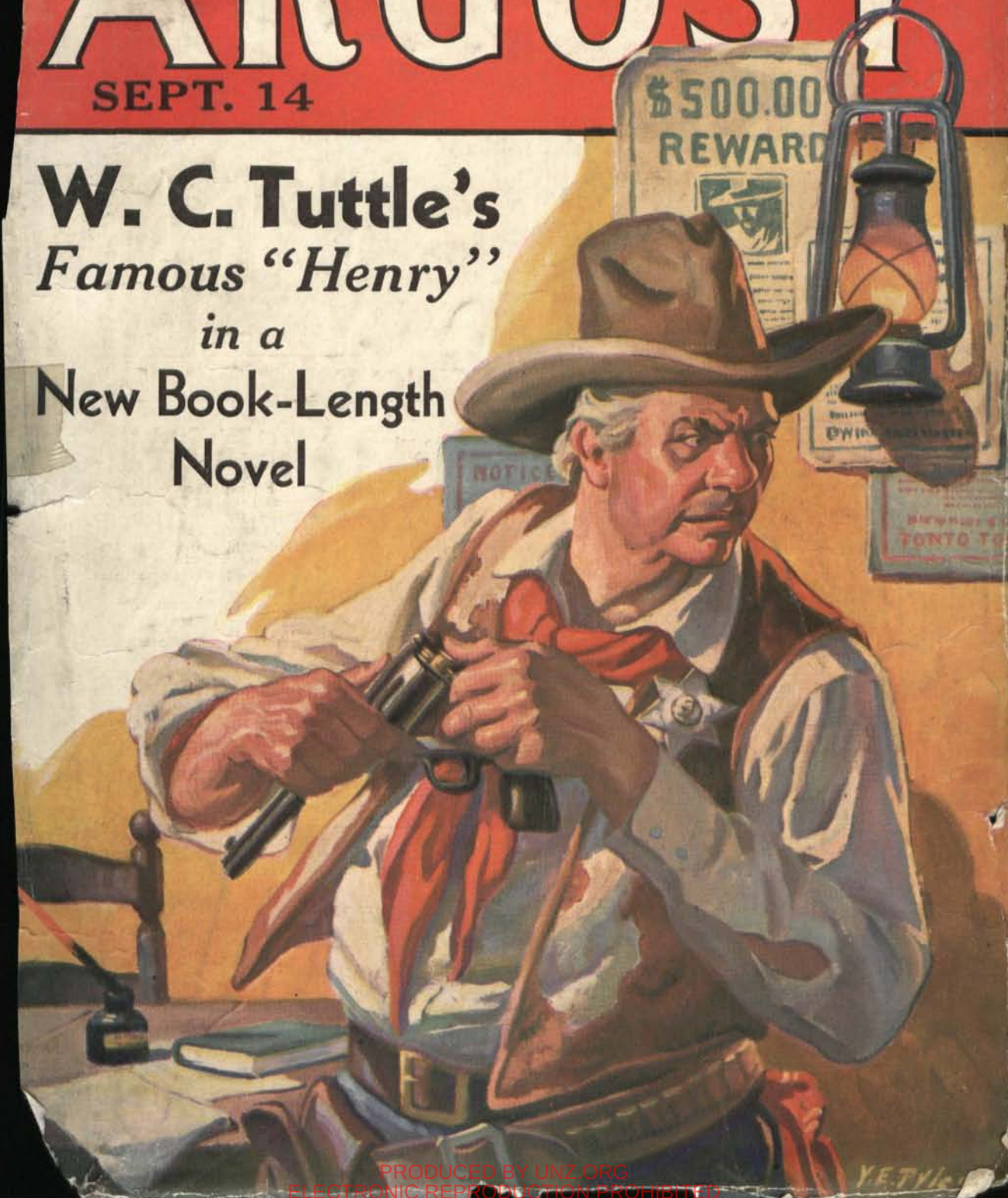

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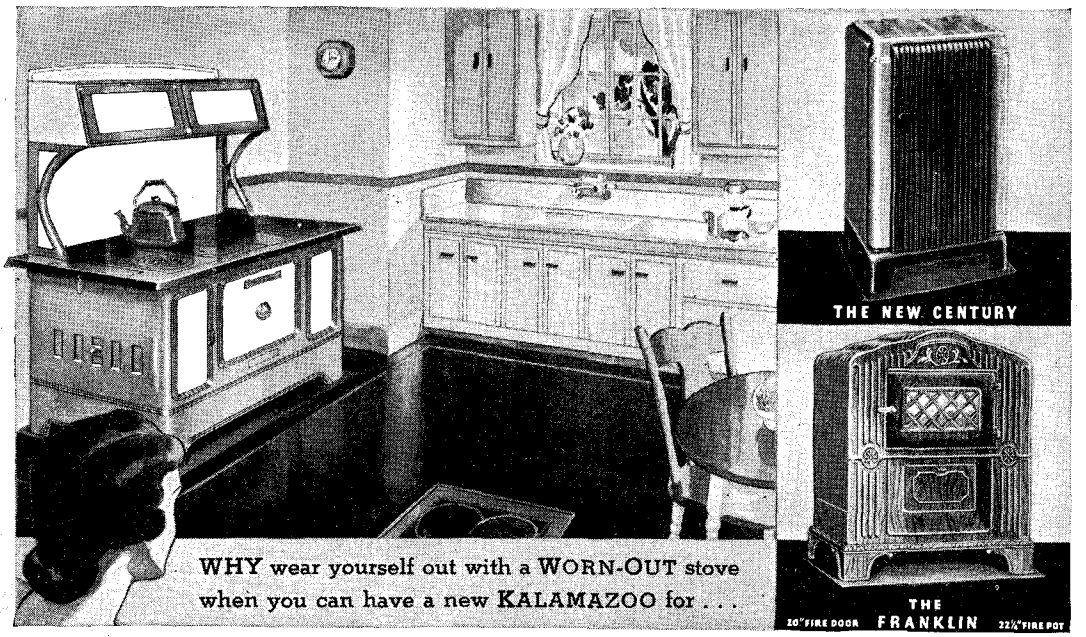
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Action Stories of Every Variety

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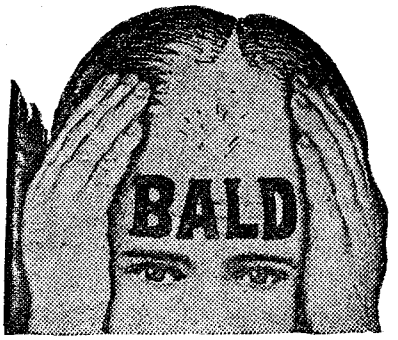
WHY MEN GO



Science Finds Easy Way to Remove Germ In Superficial Layers of Scalp and Stimulate Dormant Roots to Promote Hair Growth

(Read Free Offer)

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29x4.75-20		2.50	.95
29x5.00-19		2.85	1.05
30x5.00-20		2.85	1.05
32x5.00-22		3.65	1.05
27x5.25-17		2.90	1.15
28x5.25-18		2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19		2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20		2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.15
27x5.50-17		3.55	1.15
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BALLOON TIRES

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30x5.50-20		3.35	1.15
x6.00-16		3.75	1.45
29x6.00-17		3.40	1.15
30x6.00-18		3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20		3.45	1.25
33x6.00-21		3.65	1.25
29x6.50-17		3.45	1.35
30x6.50-18		3.50	1.35
31x6.50-19		3.60	1.35
32x6.50-20		3.75	1.35
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32x4	2.95	.85
33x4	2.95	.85
34x4	2.95	.85
32x4½	3.35	1.15
33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
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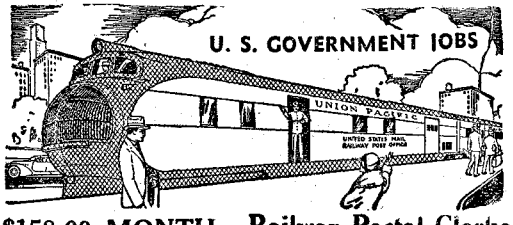

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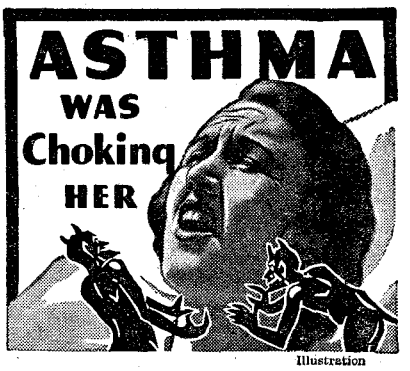

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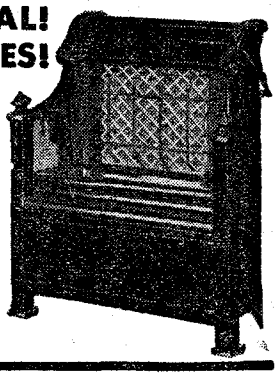

Mr. Steese calls his invention the Diamond Radiant Heater. Although amazingly inexpensive, it is a complete heating unit and works perfectly, even in zero weather. You adjust it instantly to get as much or as little heat as you want. No need in chilly Spring or Fall to keep expensive, mussy coal fires going day and night.

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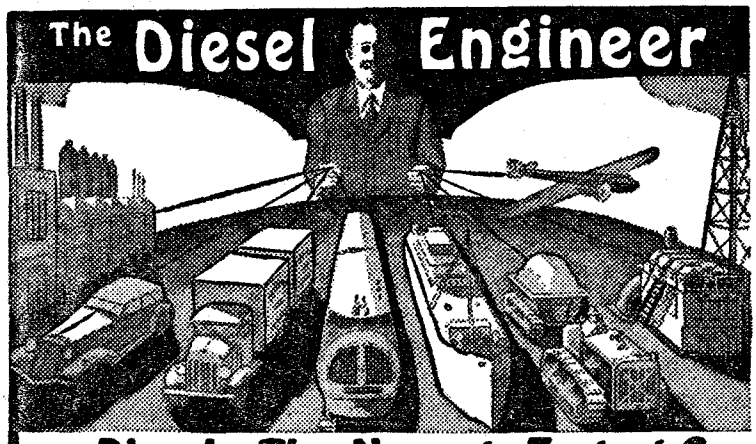

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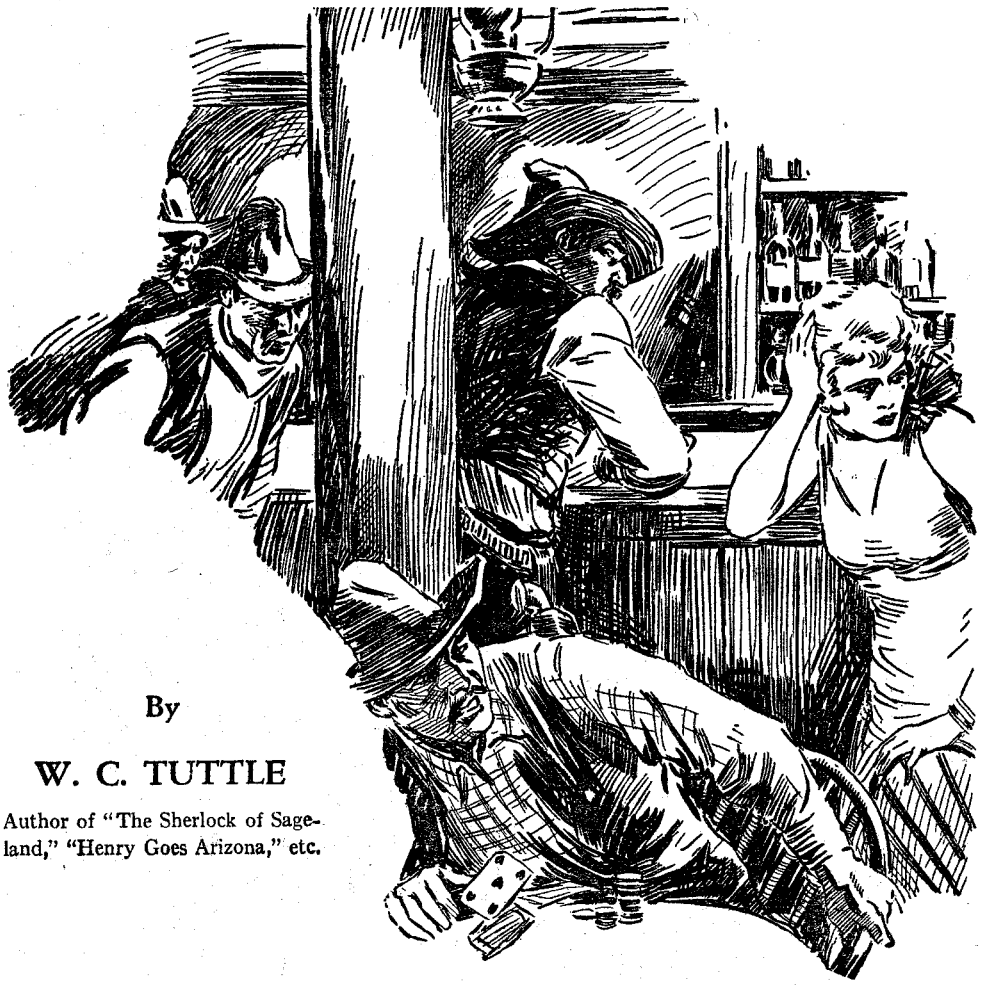

By

W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "The Sherlock of Sageland," "Henry Goes Arizona," etc.

The Sheriff of Tonto Town

A dying man who has just discovered a rich Arizona mine brings puzzling and dangerous problems to Sheriff Henry Conroy

CHAPTER I.

A QUEER GUN.

"DOC" SARGENT'S darkly handsome face was flushed with anger as he stood in the doorway of the sheriff's office, glowering at Henry Harrison Conroy, the sheriff, who sat at his desk, his spurred boots against the top edge, his knees almost touching his chin.

"It wasn't any of your damn business anyway," declared Doc Sargent hotly. "You can't do things like that, Conroy."

Doc Sargent was the most immaculate gambler in the State, with his perfectly tailored black suits, hand-made shirts, hand-made shoes. He was also very clever, with his long, flexible fingers.

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Regan slammed the gambler against the table

Henry Harrison Conroy had spent all his life, except the last few months, on the vaudeville stage, only leaving the profession when his last contract had been canceled, and an uncle had died, leaving him the J Bar C ranch in Wild Horse Valley.

Henry had made the best of it. He didn't believe in inspecting the dental work of gift horses.

Henry's nose was known from one end of the country to the other; and it was still as large and as red as ever. His face was moon-like, his head was almost bald, his eyes squinty, and his body was of tub-like proportions.

He never asked for the office of sheriff.

As a joke, his name was proposed for nomination; and he was elected—by one vote.

"I can't do things like what?" queried Henry.

"Judge" Van Treece, tilted against the wall in a much whittled chair, chuckled softly. Judge was sixty years of age, tall and gaunt, being six feet four inches tall, with a long, lean

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face and pouchy eyes. Whisky had driven Judge from practicing law. When the voters of Wild Horse Valley played a joke upon themselves by electing Henry sheriff, Henry decided to give them additional laughs; so he appointed Judge as his deputy, and made Oscar Johnson the jailer. Just now Oscar was sitting on the cot, apparently paying no attention to the conversation. Oscar had the body of a Hercules, faded blond hair, a button-like nose, and small blue eyes.

DOC SARGENT'S eyes shifted to Judge, who had chuckled.

"Do you see anything funny in this, Van Treece?" he asked.

"It has its element of humor," admitted Judge.

"Well, I don't see it," said Doc coldly.

"I am just wondering if you are expecting me to break down and cry?" said Henry slowly. "The fact still remains that the young man was being fleeced, Mr. Sargent. He sold that property for the sum of four thousand dollars. That is a mighty lot of money for a young cowboy to have.

"You happened to know that Mr. West paid him that much money. I happen to know that Mr. West now owns the Tonto Saloon. The idea was, I believe, to separate that young cowboy from his four thousand as quickly and as painlessly as possible. Well, I believe you have at least half of it, Mr. Sargent. Let well enough alone."

"That's all right," said the dapper gambler easily. "But you openly accused me of crooked dealing."

"Rather," corrected Henry, "I congratulated you on your perfect technique in palming cards. For many years, in vaudeville, I have watched the cleverest sleight-of-hand performers—magicians, if you please—and none of them—"

"What the hell has that got to do with the case?" demanded the gambler. "I say that I dealt a square game. Was it my fault if that fool cowboy overplayed his cards?"

"Nor the cards," added Henry. "They were good hands, I'll admit. In fact, I have never seen three aces beat three kings as many times. Queerly enough, you always drew to one pair, while the young cowboy had his set of threes before the draw. But"—Henry squinted close at the gambler—"that was all right, until I saw how you got that third ace."

"You lie, if you say—"

Wham! The little office shook from the concussion of a forty-five revolver, and a section of the door frame, adjacent to the head of Doc Sargent, splintered off and went flying into the street.

Henry went over backwards, struck the wall and slid slowly to the floor, feet in the air, while Doc Sargent seemed to fade out, so swiftly did he leave the immediate vicinity of the office. Henry grunted, turned over to his hands and knees, and slowly got to his feet. His overwrought leather belt had busted, and he made a frantic grab to hold up his overalls, as he glared at Oscar Johnson.

Judge sat there, as one petrified, merely his eyes shifting.

"You—you fool Swede!" gasped Henry. "I—I've busted my belt!"

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar blandly.

"In the name of everything, what happened?" gasped Judge.

"Das ha'ar gon," replied Oscar, "von't stay cocked."

Henry blinked at the heavy re-

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volver in Oscar's big hand. He looked at the splintered doorway and shuddered.

"You say that gun won't stay cocked?" queried Judge. "Wh-why, didn't you know it wouldn't? What were you—"

"Please, Judge," interrupted Henry, "let me handle it. Oscar, why won't that gun stay cocked?"

"Va'l"—Oscar's blue eyes looked innocently at Henry—"mebbe it vars because Ay pulled de trigger, Henry."

Henry tugged up his overalls, let loose with one hand, and rubbed his nose carefully.

"Very few of them will stay cocked, under those circumstances," he said slowly. "But, Oscar, you might have killed that man! Don't you realize—oh, no, of course you don't; you wouldn't."

Henry shrugged his shoulders and looked at his upset chair.

"That Terrible Swede is going to kill somebody—some time," said Judge wearily.

"Ay hope to ta'l you," agreed Oscar.

HENRY walked over to the doorway and looked out at the street. Doc Sargent was nowhere in sight. In less than sixty days Tonto City had changed from a sleepy little cow-town to a boom mining town of over five thousand. The magic lure of a big gold strike was bringing in more people every day.

"You can't stand there forever, holding up your pants, Henry," said Judge.

Henry turned and came back to his desk.

"Forever is a long time, Judge," he said sadly. He picked up his cartridge belt and buckled it securely around the top of his overalls. He heaved a deep sigh and sat on a corner of his desk.

"At times I weary of Tonto City," he said. "I want the old town again, Judge. I want to sit down in the shade and let the rest of the world pass by. Look at it now. Wild-eyed, hard-faced men, painted women. Garish-fronted buildings, roaring honkytonks; a city of tent houses, shuddering to the jar of dynamite blasts. I hate it, sir."

"So do I," nodded Judge. "But, sir, our combined hates of the present condition of Tonto City only serve to make us both look a little older. If you don't take that gun away from Oscar, and keep it away from him, I am going to have a complete physical breakdown."

"Ay bought das ha'r gon," stated Oscar belligerently, "and it belongs to me. Das ha'r town is gettin' so damn tough, Ay must have a gon—yust like any yailer."

"I suppose he is right," sighed Henry. "After all, Judge, if you are fated to die by the gun, what difference who fires it?"

"I don't want to die accidentally," said Judge.

"Life is an accident—why not death?" queried Henry.

"Ay am no accident," denied Oscar.

"You, my dear Oscar, were a mistake," smiled Henry.

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar blandly. He shoved the big gun inside the waistband of his overalls and sauntered out.

"A Swedish accident, goin' out to happen," sighed Henry.

"With a gun, he is positively a menace to all of Arizona," declared Judge. "He will go across the street, swagger for an hour in the Tonto Saloon, ogling all the girls, and come back

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bursting with egotism. I imagine he'll be very popular over there, since he nearly murdered Doc Sargent."

"I suppose," sighed Henry.

"And another thing, Henry. You are new to this country. I've been here ever since the Huachuca Mountains were holes in the ground. That is, they were still slight depressions when I arrived. I know the pulse of the West. Now, in that little matter—"

"Check that with the rest of the scenery," interrupted Henry. "For the tenth time, you are going to explain to me that I am not supposed to act as a dry-nurse to embryo gamblers. That my business is to be the sheriff, acting only in cases of law-breakage. That I must ignore crooked dealing, fixed roulette wheels, and loaded dice. All this must I do, in order that the world may stay bright to my vision and my body remain perpendicular."

"Quite right," nodded Judge. "Minding one's own business is the best life insurance in this country, sir. I have seen many a test case. Let Jack West and his hired help operate the Tonto. I'm sure they will not interfere in your operating the sheriff's office."

"In other words," smiled Henry, "they will promise not to make any arrests as long as I refrain from running gambling games, selling liquor, or operating a honkytonk in the county jail."

"Something like that," agreed Judge.

"And you," said Henry accusingly, "a man of your age, steeped in the lore of Blackstone, a gentleman in spite of an uncontrollable thirst, can sit there and calmly explain to me just why I should shut my eyes to crooked practices. My dear Judge, I am afraid you were educated in law—not in justice."

"It is merely common practice to mind one's own business, Henry. The world laughs at a crusader."

"And so we talk in circles, Judge," smiled Henry. "Talking, even in circles, is a dry occupation. Were I to mention a drink—"

JUDGE was already out of his chair, and arm in arm they went to the Tonto Saloon, which now bore the gaudy sign:

TONTO SALOON

GAMBLING PALACE AND PLACE OF ENTERTAINMENT

Miners, just off shift, with the muck of the mines on their clothes, rubbed elbows with seedy-looking prospectors, cowboys, speculators, and the general following of a new gold strike.

Where the Tonto Saloon had been one low-ceilinged room, it was now a big three-room establishment, each room far larger than the original cow-town saloon.

Jack West owned it now, and Jack West also owned the richest mines in the district. Although few men in Wild Horse Valley had ever seen Jack West, his operations were well known. Twenty years ago he had discovered and sold the Three Partners mine for over a million. This was in the Maricopa district, two hundred miles from Tonto City. Stories had been told in which West and a partner, in a quarrel which almost ended fatally, played one hand of poker for ownership of the Three Partners—and West won.

"To you, sir," said Henry Harrison Conroy.

"And to you, sir," replied Judge Van Treece.

Drinking, with them, was a ritual; and always amusing to the rough ele-

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ment of Tonto City. Standing near them was an oldish man, poorly dressed, and with a terribly scarred face. It was really one continuous scar, which began high up on his forehead above his left eye, extended down the bridge of his nose, where it went at a right angle, cutting deep into his right cheek, and then looped down around his mouth, like an inverted question mark. His eyes were almost concealed under his beetling brows.

"It is not my custom," remarked Judge, "to belittle whisky, no matter how humble its origin, but that," pointing at the bottle, "is hardly fit for human consumption."

"Your trouble," smiled the bartender, "is the fact that you have been drinking prune whisky. The liquor in that bottle is pure stuff."

"Not rye — just stuff," nodded Henry. "I detest that word 'stuff.' It reeks of pillows, mattresses. Judge, will you have another—er—stuff?"

"Not from that same bottle, Henry. Have you something in bonded liquor?"

A commotion outside caused them to step back to the doorway, where a crowd had gathered. Danny Regan and Slim Pickins, the foreman and a cowboy from Henry's J Bar C ranch, were in the ranch buckboard, and several men were crowded around the rear of the equipage, where a man was stretched out, his feet hanging over the rear.

"Is Dr. Bogart there—in the saloon?" asked Danny.

"Here he comes now," called a voice.

Dr. Bogart was hurrying across the street. He took one look at the injured man, and ordered Danny to take him down to the house where Dr. Bogart lived, which he also used as an office. Danny whirled the team around and drove swiftly away.

"Dynamite accident," said one of the men. "Badly busted, I reckon."

THE crowd separated, going about their own business. Henry saw the scar-faced man, standing there on the sidewalk, looking down the street where the buckboard had disappeared around a corner. In all his life Henry Harrison Conroy had never seen such hate depicted on a human countenance as was on the face of this scarred person.

Henry looked curiously at Judge, who had also noted it. Finally the scar-faced man went slowly across the street.

"Danny will come back to the office, Judge," said Henry. "We'll get the details of this accident."

They walked back and sat down in the office.

"You noticed the scar-faced man, Henry?" queried Judge.

Henry nodded slowly.

"I did, Judge; and if the devil has a worse expression, I hope the preachers are mistaken about damnation. No doubt, some of it was due to that scar."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Judge. "But that scar flamed scarlet, while the rest of his face turned gray. He saw the man in the buckboard. I saw him take a look, and then he drew back."

Danny and Slim came back in a few minutes and tied their horses in front of the office.

"We found him beside the road, a mile this side of the ranch," explained Danny. "He'd fallen off his old horse. Couldn't talk much, but managed to tell us that a delayed blast went off on him. He got on his horse

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and headed for a doctor, but fainted from loss of blood. Henry, the poor devil is all busted to hell."

"That's certainly hard luck," said Henry. "Who is he, Danny?"

"We never asked him. It was mighty hard for him to talk."

"I was scared to help him pack into the house—scared he'd fall to pieces," said Slim. "He kept mumblin' somethin' about strikin' it rich."

"That's right," nodded Danny. "He kept sayin' somethin' about jewelry ore. What's that?"

"A common expression among miners and prospectors," said Judge. "It refers to very rich stuff—sparkling with gold, or silver."

"Perhaps," said Henry sadly, "he has found the end of the rainbow; and in his delirium he sees the pots of gold, or a dream-vein, studded with the stuff he gave up his life to find."

"Frijole Bill sent in a jug," said Slim. "I'll get it."

Frijole Bill Cullison, the little cook at the J Bar C, spent much of his spare time distilling prune-juice, of which he sent a generous share to the sheriff's office staff.

It was never more than a few days old, but its kick was tremendous. Oscar Johnson preferred it to any other beverage.

"WE must hide this from Oscar," said Judge. "Of such stuff is total wreckage manufactured. And don't forget, Henry—Oscar has a gun which won't stay cocked."

"My gosh, you didn't give the Terrible Swede a gun, didja?" exclaimed Danny.

"No; he bought it for himself," replied Henry.

"And that Swede is as lethal as a quart of nitro-glycerine," sighed Judge. "I'm afraid to sneeze in his presence."

"Why don't you fire him, Henry?" asked Danny. "Send him back to the ranch, where he can't do worse than to break the neck of a horse or two. Hire a good jailer."

"Oscar rises or falls with the office," replied Henry.

"It is no use, Danny," sighed Judge. "Henry won't listen to reason."

"Reason!" snorted Henry. "If I did, I'd fire all three of us. God knows the job is dreary enough, without taking away my greatest source of amusement. You underestimate Oscar. Oh, I am perfectly aware that he does everything wrong. But I have a system. I tell him to do something *wrong*, and he will invariably do it *right*."

"But," reminded Judge, "you have managed to keep guns out of his hands, Henry. If he gets a dozen drinks under his belt, he will take a shot at everyone on the street."

"That isn't possible, Judge."

"Why isn't it possible?"

"Because I only let him have five cartridges."

"I reckon we better go back to the ranch, before Oscar starts usin' up his allowance," said Danny seriously. "And please keep him away from Harper's Millinery Store, Henry," added Danny. "The last time Oscar got drunk he went over there and tried on six hats. Leila and her mother tried to get him to quit it, but he wouldn't budge. He said, 'Ay am tryin' to find purty hat for Yosephine. You see, any hat dat looks goot on me will be yust right for Yosephine.'"

"Did he buy one?" asked Judge.

"Can yuh imagine Oscar lookin' good in a woman's hat?"

"Or Josephine?" added Henry. "I

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could only imagine her, standing on the prow of a Viking ship, her yellow locks flailing in the wind. To my mind, she is wasted, making beds in the Tonto Hotel, or poking the muzzle of an insect gun into the folds of a mattress. She is a fit mate for a fighting Swede."

"And she'll get one, too—if she ever quits throwing chairs and crockery at Oscar," chuckled Judge. "The last time, she missed Oscar and crippled a traveling salesman. It cost the hotel ten dollars to square the fight. They tried to make Oscar pay the ten—for dodging—but he asked me for legal assistance, and I responded."

"I witnessed that scene," remarked Henry thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, I do not believe she ever threw that chair at Oscar. That traveling salesman made a smart remark to Josephine as he came into the dining room. It requires considerable time for Josephine to digest any remark. She was very thoughtful for a time. At least time for the salesman to have forgotten her existence. Oscar merely happened to be standing in the line of fire.

"In the parlance of horseshoe pitching, it was a perfect ringer. The salesman staggered out of the dining room, with the back of the chair suspended around his neck, the seat of it dangling in front of him, and he was beating time on it with his fists, like a snare-drummer."

The two cowboys chuckled at Henry's description.

"We'll be going back now," said Danny. "Did that feller Werner come in to see yuh yet, Henry?"

"Not yet, Danny. Who is Werner?"

"He's that new butcher. He's tryin' to contract with several of the mines. He was goin' to talk prices with you. We might sell a lot of beef to him."

"I'll be looking for him, Danny."

AFTER the two cowboys drove away, Judge opened the jug, and they each took a big drink.

"By gad, sir!" exploded Judge, half strangled, "that is liquor! It warms the cockles of one's heart."

Henry squinted thoughtfully, his lips puckered.

"Warms the cockles of one's heart, eh? It may warm the cockles of your heart, Judge; but that one drink cauterized a corn on my left foot. It is the compound tincture of red-hot pokers. Whew!"

Again they bowed to each other and drank again.

"Not bad at all, sir," admitted Henry. "It is like getting your head chopped off—it only hurts the first time."

"A grand boy, that Danny Regan," said Judge, apropos of nothing.

Henry nodded solemnly, his eyes squinted close, as he considered Judge for several moments.

"Aye, a grand boy," admitted Henry. "Judge, old friend, I have something to impart to you; something I have told no one as yet."

"Except to Mrs. Harper," corrected Judge soberly.

"Well, well!" Henry's solemn face became wreathed with smiles. "You guessed it, Judge?"

"Not exactly, Henry. I knew it was either an upset physical condition—or love. Your own remark settled the question. When is it to be?"

"You won't mention it to anyone, Judge?"

"I never betray a trust, sir."

"Well," smiled Henry, "we haven't set a date. We haven't even told Leila

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and Danny; but we hope to make it a double marriage."

"Wonderful! Henry, she is an estimable woman; I congratulate you."

"Thank you, Judge—thank you. I—I feel so damn foolish."

"Then you look exactly as you feel. Let us have a drink. Hold out your cup. Good. Well, sir—to an old fool."

"To you, Judge."

CHAPTER II.

DEAD MAN'S SECRET.

"I'VE waited twenty long years to kill you, Parke Neal; and now I find yuh dyin'. Damn yore soul, it ain't square. But you never did play square with me. Six hours late—after twenty years."

The scar-faced man's voice broke huskily, his gnarled fingers clutching his knees. In the dim lamplight that terrible scar looked like a fresh wound. The dying man, bearded and unkempt, his hands twisted in the clean sheet, blinked at the ceiling.

"I'll take yore word for who yuh say yuh are," he whispered hoarsely. "Things is kinda blurred. But you ain't Tom Silver. He had black hair, a handsome face. Wild Tom Silver. Where yuh been, Tom?"

"In the penitentiary, damn yuh. I follered yuh to Yuma—to kill yuh. I saw where yuh registered for a room; and I went to that room in the dark—and shot yuh full of holes. But I killed the wrong man, damn yuh. I killed the man in room twenty-eight—and you was in twenty-three."

The dying man closed his eyes for several moments, his brow knitted.

"I 'member," he whispered. "A man named Condon. But they said a man named—it wasn't Silver—"

"I never gave my right name. I didn't want anybody to know. Oh, I knew you was in love with my wife, Neal. I seen you give her money. I took it away from her and threw it in the street. Jack West knew I was goin' to kill you."

"You fool," whispered the dying man. "Jack West sent me to her, with the money. I never tried to steal yore wife. It was dog-eat-dog, after we found the Three Partners mine. West wanted it all—and mebbe I did, too. After you disappeared, me and West fought. He beat me out of my share, Tom; robbed me with crooked cards. But he's rich now, Tom. He owns most of the mines in this valley—owns everythin'."

"What about the woman?" asked Silver. "Don't lie, Neal. There was to be a baby—soon. Don't lie to me. Where's the woman and the baby?"

"She's—she's— Hold me—up."

Tom Silver reached over quickly and lifted Neal's head and shoulders, but it was too late. The door opened, and Dr. Bogart came in.

"He jist died, Doc," said Silver.

The doctor made an examination, and drew the sheet over the dead man's face.

"I knew it was only a matter of a short time," he said. "He was badly broken—poor devil. And just when he had made his strike."

Silver looked quickly at the doctor. "Strike?" he said curiously.

"So he said. Perhaps it was an hallucination, caused by his accident. He said it would be worth millions; bigger than the Three Partners."

The doctor leaned over the bed and looked all around. "He wanted pencil and paper," he said. "Seemed to want to write something."

The oil lamp guttered smokily, and

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the doctor turned to the table. "I'll fill the lamp," he said, and went out.

Tom Silver stepped over to the bedside, pawing swiftly at the bedding. In the folds of a blanket he found two sheets of paper and a pencil. One sheet contained writing, but Tom Silver did not stop to read it. Tucking it in a pocket, he replaced the pencil and unused paper.

THE doctor refilled the lamp, and found the paper and pencil. "Too badly injured to write," he remarked. "I don't see how he lived as long as he did. But these old prospectors—"

Some one was knocking on the door.

"Come in," called the doctor.

The door swung open and a woman stepped inside.

She was tall and slender, shimmering with silk. The yellow lamplight glistened on the gold of her hair as she came forward. She was beautiful, in spite of her make-up. She glanced at the sheeted figure on the bed and shook her head.

"Dead?" she said throatily.

"He died a few minutes ago," replied the doctor.

The woman nodded slowly.

"I didn't know about it until a short time ago," she said.

"You knew him?" queried the doctor.

"I staked him twice," she said simply, turned and walked out, closing the door.

"Who is she, Doc?" asked Tom Silver.

"They call her Lola," replied the doctor. "She's—she sings—and deals faro for the Tonto. They say she's hard as the devil. I don't know about that."

"She staked him twice," said Tom Silver. "She—she ain't very old, Doc."

"Too young to be doing what she's doing. It must be a hell of a life for a girl."

"That's right. Well, I'll be goin', Doc."

Tom Silver walked down the slope to the main street, where he entered the Tonto Saloon. The games were running full blast. Over at the long bar, a drunken miner was trying to sing to the music of a tinkling music-box. Silver sat down against the wall, hunched to a comfortable position, and drew out the crumpled paper he had filched from the dead man. The penciled scrawl read:

> I struck it rich, but Doc says I'm dying. I hereby give my mine to Lola, the faro dealer at the Tonto Saloon. It is located—

Parke Neal had died before telling where the mine was located. Perhaps his fingers had failed him, or he had forgotten. Tom Silver crumpled the paper in his hand, staring with unseeing eyes.

"Lola," he muttered. "Lola. That's what I called my wife."

With a trembling hand he shoved the paper deep in his pocket. Some men at the bar were talking about Parke Neal, and Tom Silver listened.

"I tell yuh, it's richer'n hell. They was some samples in his saddle bags. You talk about jewelry!"

"But where did he find it?" asked the bartender.

"Who knows?"

"Yuh could look for his recordin' and see."

"It ain't recorded. I'll betcha there's been a dozen men over at the recorder's office, tryin' to find out."

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"Well, I'd shore like to see a vein as rich as the Three Partners. There was a mine for yuh."

"Don't I know it!" laughed a miner. "I've worked there. West sold it for over a million. Mebbe you fellers don't know it, but there's been bad blood between Neal and West for years. Neal was a partner of West, and Neal claimed West froze a deck of cards on him and beat him out of his share of the Three Partners."

"It wasn't that—not alone," chimed in another. "They had a lot of trouble over a woman."

"Who got the woman?" laughed the bartender.

"I dunno who got her. That's a hell of a long time to remember about another man's woman. Well, here's hopin' Parke Neal strikes it rich—wherever he's gone."

TOM SILVER walked out of the saloon. The stage from Scorpion Bend was just pulling into town, and Silver walked slowly up to the stage station, where a crowd usually collected to look over the new arrivals. Two huge lanterns lighted the front.

A huge, well-dressed man was on the seat with the driver. He was of middle age, but powerfully built, with a face as hard as carved granite. Tom Silver shoved in close to the front of the stage, looking square at the big man.

It was the supreme test. If Jack West could not recognize Tom Silver, no man could. For a moment the hard, gray eyes of Jack West searched the scarred face, but there was no sign of recognition. Twenty years in prison, plus a dynamite blast, had given Tom Silver a perfect disguise.

Jack West went straight to the Tonto Saloon, where he met Doc Sargent, and they went back to Sargent's private office. They had a drink of private stock liquor, and Sargent tossed a piece of ore on the desk in front of West, who examined it critically.

"Where did that come from, Doc?" asked West curiously.

"Do you remember Parke Neal?"

West's lips tightened for a moment.

"No need to ask me that question, Doc."

"Neal found that ore, West. He was smashed up in a blast, tried to get to a doctor, but fell off his horse along the road. A couple of cowboys from the J Bar C found him and brought him in here. Later some fellows found his horse, and that is one of the samples he had in his saddle bags."

"My God, Doc, that's rich stuff! Even a small vein— Wait! What about his mine—isn't it recorded?"

The dapper gambler shook his head slowly.

"That's the rub, West; he never recorded it. Never left a scrap of paper to show where it's located."

"He's dead, eh?"

Doc Sargent nodded. "Died less than an hour ago, over at Dr. Bogart's house. But here's something, West. Lola staked Neal. When she heard he was hurt, she slipped out of here and went up there. Whether she was there before he died, or not, I don't know."

"She staked him, eh?" mused West darkly.

"Twice, I believe."

West looked curiously at his boss gambler.

"Why did she stake him, Doc?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe she was playing a hunch. She has plenty of witnesses to the fact that she staked Neal. Unless the claim was recorded, she hasn't any legal right to it, of course."

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"No claim in the world," said West coldly, as he examined the piece of ore again. "Look at the stuff, Doc! It's rotten with gold."

West laid the ore aside and helped himself to another drink.

"What else is new, Doc?" he asked.

"I damn near got killed today."

"You did? How'd that happen, Doc?"

The gambler told West about the poker incident, and what happened at the sheriff's office when he went to remonstrate with the sheriff.

"I've heard about that sheriff and his gang," said West. "They told me in Scorpion Bend that Tonto City had three of the craziest peace officers in Arizona."

Doc Sargent nodded gloomily. "And they can drink more liquor than any other three people in the State. The Swede gets wild; but the other two merely become more dignified and courteous."

"How in hell do they manage to operate their office?"

"Just about like they did today; drive you away with a bullet."

"Not so good," said West. "I'll be down here quite a lot now, Doc. I've got things workin' good at Maricopa; and I'll have more time. Maybe I'll have a little talk with this sheriff. He'd better understand that what goes on in here is none of his business; and if he don't keep his nose out of my business—there'll be a new sheriff."

CHAPTER III.

BRASS KNUCKLES.

IT was mid afternoon next day when Lola came to the Tonto. She did not go on shift until early in the evening. Men turned to stare at her, but she paid no attention. Doc Sargent was sitting alone at a table, staring moodily at an empty whisky glass on the table. He glanced up at Lola and motioned for her to sit down.

"You don't look very happy," she said quietly.

Doc smiled sourly and shook his head.

"Drinking whisky, too," observed the girl. "Rather unusual, isn't it, Doc?"

The handsome gambler laughed shortly. "I needed a bracer, Lola."

"Nerves?"

"Maybe. Yes, I guess it's nerves."

"Or," suggested Lola, "was it reaction from that shot yesterday?"

"No, it wasn't that."

Lola looked at him thoughtfully and a smile flashed across her eyes. "Not the little lady of the millinery—I hope."

Doc looked curiously at her.

"You hope?" he queried.

"So that *is* the reason. Yes, I have seen you over there. But isn't she engaged to marry that good-looking, red-headed cowboy? Danny Regan is the name, I believe?"

"Good-looking!"

"Well, he is good-looking; clean-looking, anyway. He has a wonderful smile—and how he can ride! I don't blame the little milliner."

"You're a lot of satisfaction," grunted Doc. "You wouldn't marry me, you know."

"Why should I marry you, Doc?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Doc Sargent looked narrowly at Lola for several moments.

"If you think this Danny Regan is so wonderful, why don't you take him yourself?" he asked.

"Take him?" Lola laughed heartily. "Doc, you talk as though such things

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were as easy as drawing a card off the deck. Anyway, the young man is engaged to marry a very charming young lady; so your question is answered."

"Neither of them means a thing to you, eh?"

"Certainly not. But why such a question, Doc?"

"Will you do me a favor, Lola?"

"That depends on the favor. What do you want?"

"I want that girl—Leila Harper. I want to marry her."

"Oh, I see-e-e. I suppose you want me to go over to her and tell her what a wonderful husband you would make."

"Hardly. I want you to make a play for Danny Regan."

"You want me to make a play—for Danny Regan?"

"That's it, Lola. If Leila even thought—"

"Hold it!" snapped Lola. "You're dealing off the bottom again, Doc. I see what you mean. My advice to you is to confine your crooked dealing to the poker table."

Doc Sargent flushed hotly.

"So you think I'm crooked, eh?" he sneered. "Listen to me! One word from me, and you'd lose your job so damn quick that—"

Lola laughed across the table at him. "Try it, Doc," she said easily. "And after you've told Jack West that I wouldn't be a party to your crooked work—he might tell you that he pays me more salary than you are getting. Stick to cards, and leave love to—well, to people who don't deal cards."

BOTH of them were so absorbed in their conversation that they had paid no attention to those about them. As Lola started to get to her feet she looked square into the eyes of Danny Regan. She and Danny had never exchanged a word. Danny rarely took a drink, and most of his gambling was confined to bunk-house games.

He was standing close behind Doc Sargent; and Lola had no idea how long he had been there.

"Thank yuh very much, ma'am," he said to her calmly.

Doc Sargent turned quickly in his chair and looked up at Danny. Doc prided himself on his poker-face, his steel nerves.

"Have a drink, Regan," he said calmly, and the next instant he was lifted bodily from the chair and slammed back against the table. Lola merely stepped back and said:

"Watch for that derringer—vest pocket."

"I got it the first grab," said Danny easily.

He whirled Sargent around, his left hand twisted in the gambler's collar, choking him.

Sargent was helpless, his hands clawing impotently at Danny's clenched left hand. The crowd was aware of the trouble, and came shoving in.

Danny merely gave them a sharp glance as he said, "Keep back—all of yuh; this is my job."

Danny did not see Jack West come from the rear of the room. He was behind Danny now, and his huge left fist smashed with stunning force against the side of Danny's head, knocking Danny almost into the crowd, where he sprawled on the floor, blood running from his face.

Doc Sargent was sprawling across the table, trying to pump air into his tortured lungs, while the crowd stood around and dumbly looked at Danny. Tom Silver was one of the crowd.

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West turned to the bartender and said:

"Throw some water on him and tell him to go home."

West turned, grasped Sargent by the arm, and led him back to the office, where he closed the door.

Danny was on his feet in a few minutes, but still dazed and bleeding. The bartender mopped him off with a wet towel.

"Ye felt the weight of Jack West's fist, me lad," said a grizzled miner. "Th' big felly hits ha-ard."

"Yuh don't need much weight to yore fist if yuh wear knucks," said Tom Silver.

Danny looked curiously at him. "So that's what cut me, eh?" he said.

"No fist was ever hard enough to gouge like that. Yuh better have the doctor fix yuh up."

Danny nodded and turned away. At the doorway he stopped and looked back. Lola was near the same spot, looking at him. He smiled weakly and lifted his hat before he went out.

Back in Sargent's office, Jack West sat down at the desk and watched the boss gambler pull himself together.

"Well, what started it?" asked West.

Doc's voice was husky as he replied painfully, "The damn fool cowpuncher! Lola and I were quarreling a little, and he took it upon himself to interfere."

"What were you quarreling about?"

"Oh"—Doc cleared his throat and smiled wryly—"she intimated that I was crooked. She made me mad."

"Mad?" West laughed. "That's like a kettle gettin' mad because yuh called it black. Don't quarrel with her any more. She's bringin' in the business—and she's a damn good faro dealer. Any mail come here for me?"

"In that top drawer, on the left side."

WEST jerked the drawer out and removed several letters, which he glanced through quickly. One envelope was sealed, but not addressed.

"Is that yours?" he asked.

"Not mine," replied Doc Sargent.

West tore the envelope open and shook out a newspaper clipping. It was faded and yellow with age, bearing the date line of a small Eastern town. West was reading swiftly, and all the color seemed to drain from his hard features. Finally he clenched his jaw tightly and looked across the table at Sargent.

"You don't know where this came from?" he asked in a brittle voice.

"I never saw that blank envelope before," replied Sargent.

With a hand that trembled too much, West thought he returned the clipping to the envelope. Shoving the envelope into his pocket, he got to his feet.

"I'm goin' out to eat," he said, and walked out, closing the door.

The gambler stepped to the door, opened it a few inches, and saw West leave the saloon. Then he turned quickly, found the clipping under the desk, and proceeded to read:

> Officers are still searching for Handsome Jack West, who, it is alleged, beat his wife almost to death a week ago, and robbed her of eight thousand dollars, which she had received on a sale of her home.
>
> Since the murderous assault by her husband, Mrs. West has been confined to a local hospital, and the doctors fear that she will be permanently crippled. Mrs. West has one child, by her former husband, Henry Woods.

Doc Sargent whistled softly to himself. There was nothing to show what

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year this happened, but the clipping was very old. He folded it carefully and placed it deep in his pocket. Sargent was not above blackmail, in case he needed a little extra power.

"Who in the devil ever put that in the desk?" he wondered, and helped himself to a big drink. "Anyway," he decided, "I better put it in a safe place right now."

Feeling very well satisfied with himself, in spite of a sore neck and a torn shirt, Doc Sargent sauntered out to the bar, where he had a drink. The bartender leaned across the bar, speaking confidentially with the boss gambler.

"Doc, who is that scar-faced hombre over there by the chuckaluck table?"

"I don't know who he is. He sure carries a brand. What about him?"

"Oh, nothing much, except that he told Regan that West had on brass knuckles when he hit him."

Doc smiled thinly. "West usually wears 'em, I understand."

"I know—but this is different. West is used to fighting with miners. Cowboys don't take kindly to brass knuckles."

Doc shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"What of it?" he asked.

"Nothing—mebbe. They tell me that Regan is a fast gunman."

"Well, that's no skin off my nose. What became of my derringer?"

"Regan got it."

"Quite a boy—this Regan," mused Doc thoughtfully.

JACK WEST came back to the Tonto and walked quickly through the big room, going straight back to the office. Doc Sargent's eyes narrowed as he watched the broad back of his employer disappear through the doorway. He turned back to the bar and was talking with the bartender when West came up to him.

"Come back to the office, Doc," he said.

West closed the office door and stepped over near the desk.

"You saw me take a newspaper clipping from an envelope a while ago, Doc," he said slowly, his eyes narrowed.

"Yes, I did," replied Doc. "You put it back in the envelope and put it in your pocket."

"You saw me do that?"

"Why—yes, I saw you. What about it, West?"

West turned and knelt down beside the desk, searching the floor. He opened desk drawers, examined them, and searched the floor of the little office. Finally he got to his feet and leaned against the desk, a puzzled frown between his hard eyes.

"That's damn funny," he muttered. "It's gone."

"Why, you put it in that envelope," said the gambler.

"I thought I did. Doc, I'd give a cold thousand dollars for that clipping —*and no questions asked.*"

"A thousand dollars? Well, let me take a look!"

Naturally, Doc's search was futile. Finally he dusted off his knees and looked curiously at Jack West.

"Is there some joke connected with it?" he asked.

"Joke?" West smiled bitterly. "Would I pay a thousand for a joke?"

"Were you serious about that thousand dollars?"

"Yo're damn right! And I'd murder the man who got it—if he ever tried to use it."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Doc.

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"Why, what on earth was it, West?"

West ignored the direct question.

"Who came in here, after I left?" he countered.

"No one, as far as I know. I followed you out."

"Don't you keep that door locked?"

"Not very often. I'll see if I can find out who came in here."

"Drop it. Mebbe I lost it on the street, and it blew away. I hope to God I did. I'll just have to wait—and see."

"If I knew what it was—" suggested Doc.

"If you knew what it was," said West slowly, "and I knew that you knew what it was—you wouldn't live to reach that door, Doc."

"Whew! Thank you for not telling me, West. But that don't show who put it in the desk."

West shook his head slowly, but his mind was working swiftly. Who was there in Tonto City with a knowledge of things that happened in that little Eastern town nearly twenty-five years ago? Who would preserve a clipping all these years, and drop it into his mail? And why? It was a chapter of his wild life that he thought closed years ago.

"I don't know who left it there," he replied wearily. "Forget it, Doc."

"You look kinda sick, West."

"I'm all right—forget it."

"I have a very poor memory," said Doc. "But just as a word of warning—keep an eye on Danny Regan. He knows you wore a pair of brass knucks—and they say he's a *muy malo hombre* with a six-gun."

"Aw, to hell with him!" rasped West. "I know how to handle his kind."

They walked out together, and West left the saloon. His stays in Tonto City had been very short; so he sauntered along the main street, getting familiar with the business places. West intended making Tonto City his headquarters in a short time.

He stopped near the show-window of Harper's Millinery, and was idly watching the street, when a movement in the window caused him to turn his head. Mrs. Harper had drawn back the curtain background, and was arranging some hats. Mrs. Harper had been a beautiful girl, and at middle age she was a handsome woman.

WEST stared at her, his jaw slacked. It was his second shock of the day. As she lifted her head, he turned quickly away. But he got another good look at her before the curtains dropped into place. With a muttered curse on his lips, Jack West strode back to the saloon.

Doc Sargent was talking with Lola, but West called him back to the office.

"Did you find it?" queried Doc.

"No. What do you know about the Harper people—the hat store?"

Doc smiled sourly. "Not very much, West. Mother and daughter."

"Been here long."

"Quite a few years, I believe. Lon Harper, the woman's husband, has been dead quite a while, I believe."

"Yo're doin' a lot of believin', Doc."

"Maybe I am. What else do you want to know?"

"How much of a business are they doin'?"

"I don't know that one," smiled Doc. "I suppose they are making a living."

West studied the situation grimly, but made up his mind soon.

"I'm goin' back to Maricopa," he said. "Find out what that woman will take for her business—and agree not

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to start another store in Tonto City. Don't let my name figure in it. Hell, buy it in your own name. We'll find somebody to take it over."

"In other words," smiled Doc, "you want to own an exclusive on all the millinery in Tonto City."

"Think what yuh please. Pay her more than she asks. *Get her out of Tonto City.*"

Doc Sargent went back to the bar and drank two straight whiskies in succession. The plot was getting too complicated for him. He saw Jack West leave on the northbound stage, and later in the evening, when business was dull, he went over to the faro layout to talk with Lola. By that time, Doc Sargent was half-drunk, which was unusual.

"The boss headed north again," he told Lola. She nodded indifferently, glancing around the room.

"Listen," said Doc confidentially. "How would you like to own a millinery store?"

"You are drunk," she replied bluntly. Doc laughed softly.

"Only half-drunk, my dear. Listen to this, will you? West ordered me to buy out the Harper store."

Lola looked at him curiously. "I suppose it's the whisky," she said.

"No, I'm not drunk. He really wants me to buy them out. He wants to get those two women out of Tonto City."

"Why?"

"Who knows? He told me to pay them more than the place is worth."

"What on earth would he do with a millinery store?"

"Well, he said we could find somebody to take it over."

"That should be easy — in a boom town like this. But why does he want to get those two women out of town?"

"Lola," said Doc easily, "just between you and me, I believe the big boss has a skeleton in his closet—and it has began to rattle a little."

She smiled at him and shook her pretty head.

"I still think you are drunk, Doc."

"You do, eh? Well, I can show you—" Doc hesitated. He was very near to telling her about the newspaper clipping.

"You can show me what?" queried Lola.

"Nothing. Maybe I have had a little too much. Anyway, I guess I better open a game; the poker players are drifting in."

CHAPTER IV.

TOUGH LIVER.

IT was two nights after Jack West had gone back to Maricopa. Henry Harrison Conroy, Judge Van Treece and Danny Regan were having supper at the Harper home, which was the rear half of the building used as a millinery shop. Henry, shaved and polished, especially his nose, and with a napkin tucked inside his collar, smiled expansively at the array of well-cooked viands.

The left side of Danny's head was still swollen, and plentifully decorated with court-plaster. No one had told Leila and her mother about the trouble at the Tonto, and they believed Danny had been kicked by a horse.

"Ah-h-h-h!" exclaimed Henry softly. "The odors of Araby. My dear Laura, sit down, so we may form a line of direct attack."

"In moderation, Henry," warned Judge. "Remember what the merchant told you? Nothing in waist measurements above a forty-six."

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"Henry is not a forty-six," declared Mrs. Harper.

"Quite correct, Mrs. Harper," replied Judge. "That horse-blanket safety-pin is approximately six inches in length, which gives an additional five inches, at least; and the man continually complains of a tightness around his abdomen."

"That is slander, sir," declared Henry soberly. "I, fifty-one inches around the waist? Absurd!"

"Merely a fallen chest," said Danny.

"Or a bosom, which failed to rise—like Frijole Bill's biscuits," laughed Henry. "Laura, my dear, do not let Judge have that carving-knife! That man is positively penurious in carving a roast. At times, I feel that he received his law training in a barber college. A slice of rare, roast beef must be at least one-half inch thick."

"Oh, very well," sighed Judge, relinquishing the knife to Mrs. Harper. "We can alter the size of the office doorway, I suppose."

"You take a weight off my mind, Judge," smiled Henry.

The dinner, as usual, was a huge success. Henry finished a big slice of apple pie, and leaned back in his chair.

"Just at present," he stated, "I am looking at the trouble of the world through the small end of a telescope."

Danny Regan was unusually quiet during the meal; so quiet that Leila looked curiously at him several times.

"Aren't you feeling well, Danny?" she asked.

"Shore, I'm feelin' all right."

"You've been so quiet."

"With Henry and Judge here, who could get in a word?"

"By the way," said Mrs. Harper, "we have had a strange offer."

"Strange offer?" queried Henry. "An offer for what, my dear?"

"For our millinery business."

"My goodness! Someone wants to buy you out?"

Mrs. Harper nodded seriously. "A gambler wants to buy the shop."

"Heavens above!" exclaimed Henry. "What is happening to the world?"

Danny's eyes narrowed, as he looked at Leila and her mother.

"Mr. Sargent wants to buy it," said Mrs. Harper. "He came yesterday, and said he would be willing to pay us a top price, if we would agree to not open another shop in Tonto City. He wants the exclusive hat business of the town."

DANNY laughed harshly. "What would that tin-horn know about the millinery business?"

"He is likely buying it for someone else," said Judge. "With the town booming, I suppose the hat business will also boom. My advice to you would be to make him pay enough to make it worth while."

"The business is getting better," said Leila. "Our stock is worth very little, and we rent this building; so I don't see where we could make enough on a sale to do us much good. Mother and I do not want to leave Tonto City—and this is a good living."

"Did he make any offer?" asked Henry.

"No, he merely said he would pay us more than the place is worth."

"I imagine that two hundred dollars would cover the stock."

"It would more than cover it," admitted Mrs. Harper.

"And you rent the building, which could not figure on the deal. I believe that forty-eight hundred would cover the good-will. Yes, my dear, I believe a price of five thousand would be reasonable and fair."

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"Five thousand!" exclaimed Mrs. Harper. "No one, with any sense, would pay that price."

"My dear Laura, I do not consider Mr. Sargent as a brainy man. He is very nimble with his fingers—very. And anyway," Henry smiled slyly, "I should hate to see a man milliner in a town like this."

"I don't know whether Mother understood, or not," said Leila, "but Mr. Sargent intimated that, in case of a sale, we were to leave Tonto City."

"Leave Tonto City!" Henry was indignant. "The very idea! Leave Tonto City, indeed! I've a notion to go over there and — Laura, my dear woman, your selling price is twenty thousand dollars."

Mrs. Harper laughed and began clearing away the dishes.

"I am afraid that even a gambler would refuse to pay that price," she said.

"No doubt of it," agreed Henry heartily, "but it might serve to smoke an Ethiopian out of the wood-pile."

Danny leaned across the table toward Henry.

"Do yuh think there's some real reason behind this offer—except to get the shop, Henry?" he asked.

"Danny, my boy," smiled Henry, "when tin-horn gamblers develop ambition along millinery lines, it is time for all men to come to the aid of their sex. Laura, may I handle this deal?"

"I wish you would, Henry; I don't know what to say about prices."

Danny went back to the office with them. He had told Henry all about what had happened to him in the Tonto Saloon. Judge knew about it, too; and the three of them sat in the office, trying to puzzle out Doc Sargent's reasons for wanting the millinery shop.

"You are not worrying about Leila, are you, Danny?" asked Henry.

"Well, I ain't very pleased about that slick-haired gambler hangin' around there. He wanted to take her to Scorpion Bend to a dance, and she turned him down. That was when he tried to make that deal with the lady faro dealer. Henry, he's as crooked as a snake; and I don't like this deal he's tryin' to make. He's got some scheme up his sleeve."

"Let me handle the deal, Danny. And don't worry about Leila."

Judge tilted forward in his chair, listening intently. It sounded as though several people were stumbling along the wooden sidewalk, coming toward the office.

"What in the world is coming?" exclaimed Judge.

A MOMENT later Oscar Johnson came stumbling through the doorway, dragging a miner, who was almost as large as Oscar. He dumped the man in the middle of the floor, dusted off his hands and stepped back. The man's left eye was swollen shut, his nose looked like an over-ripe tomato, and there was a lump on the side of his head as large as an egg.

"What on earth happened to him?" asked Henry.

"Das ha'ar yigger," stated Oscar, "vars dasturbing de peace."

"Disturbing the peace," parroted Henry. "Oh, I see."

"Ay vant him arrested; so Ay can put him in de yail."

"I see-e-e," nodded Henry. "Disturbing the peace, and you want to put him in jail. Just whose—er—peace did he disturb, Oscar?"

"Yosephine's."

"Josephine's, eh? He disturbed her peace—and you beat him up."

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"Ay did not beat him oop," declared Oscar soberly.

"You didn't? Well, who did?"

"Yosephine."

The culprit stared around, felt tenderly of his sore head.

"What the hell's goin' on around here, anyway?" he asked hoarsely.

"My dear man," replied Henry, "you are charged with disturbing the peace."

"Huh?"

"Of course, you remember disturbing it, don't you?"

"Disturbin' what? My Gawd, what happened to me, anyway?"

Henry turned to Oscar. "What started this trouble, Oscar?"

"Va'l oll I know is vat Yosephine ta'l me. She say dis yigger coom in and set down at table, and den he say, 'Seester, how is your liver tonight?'"

"That's what I said," groaned the injured man. "Sometimes it's good and sometimes it ain't good. Hell, ain't a feller got any rights in this country? I reckon she'd 'a' killed me, if I'd asked about roast beef—I dunno."

"Case dismissed," declared Judge. "This court decides that the man has been sufficiently punished for trying to eat liver in that hotel dining room. I've tried it—and I know. The case is dismissed."

The big miner got slowly to his feet, scowled at Oscar and clenched his fists, but changed his mind and went stumbling out of the office.

"Well, what do you think of that?" breathed Danny.

"Va'l," sighed Oscar, "Ay lost my first customer."

"Oscar," said Judge, his eyes full of tears, "the peace of Tonto City is very, very hard to disturb."

"Ay skal ta'l you, Yudge," admitted Oscar soberly.

Tom Rickey, owner of the hotel, came hurrying into the office, half out of breath.

"What became of that big miner?" he asked anxiously.

"Do you mean the one with the liver trouble?" asked Henry.

"I mean the one Oscar took out of the hotel."

"Oh—that one. I suppose he went back to the Tonto Saloon."

Rickey turned to Oscar. "What on earth happened?" he asked.

"Das ha'ar faller got smort vit Yosephine."

"I see. Do you know who he is?"

"Ay have no idea."

"That man is Lars Swenson, said to be the heavyweight champion of Minnesota."

Oscar gawped blankly at Rickey for a moment.

"Is das man a Svede?"

"Norwegian, I believe."

"Yah, su-ure. Yust a dumb Norvegian. He better stay in Minnesota and fight Norvegians. Where de ha'al is dat yug of prune yuice? Ay feel like big drink."

CHAPTER V.

NICK BORDEN.

"So you want a job as a swamper, eh?"

Doc Sargent leaned against the bar in the Tonto Saloon, and looked curiously at Tom Silver.

"I've got to eat," replied the scar-faced Silver.

"Why don't you get out and take a man-sized job?"

"I'm askin' for the only job I'm qualified to do well," replied Silver. Doc laughed and looked around the nearly empty room.

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"All right. Forty a month and six drinks a day. What's your name?"

"Just call me Tom; I forgot the rest."

"All right," laughed Doc, and turned to see Henry Harrison Conroy, the sheriff, coming into the room.

"How are you, Sheriff?" he asked pleasantly. "Ripping, I hope."

Henry flinched and looked down at his waist-line.

"Not as yet," he smiled. "This man, Levi, who tailors most of the trousers worn in this country, has slim ideas."

Doc laughed and nodded to the bartender to serve them.

"I am on a little matter of business, Mr. Sargent," said Henry.

"Business?"

"Yes. Quite out of my line as a stalwart bulwark of the law, I assure you. I believe you approached Mrs. Harper, and suggested that she sell you her millinery business."

"Something like that," admitted Doc. "You don't happen—"

"My dear, sir, I never happen," interrupted Henry. "As a matter of fact, Mrs. Harper has asked me to negotiate with you. Perhaps we may arrive at some price satisfactory to all concerned."

"Well," Doc smiled slowly, "we might."

"I hope," added Henry. "Of course, the location is rented; so we may count that out of any deal we make. The stock and fixtures will amount to about two hundred dollars. Does that sound fair?"

"Do you mean that two hundred dollars is the price?"

"Oh, not at all. Business is booming, Mr. Sargent. It is the only millinery business in this town. I estimate that the good will of the place is worth nineteen thousand, eight hundred dollars. Making a grand total of twenty thousand dollars—full price."

Doc had lifted his glass, but now he placed it on the bar and looked queerly at Henry.

"Are you crazy?" he asked.

"I am not exactly certain," replied Henry thoughtfully.

"Why, I could buy the whole town for twenty thousand dollars."

"You could — once," corrected Henry. "Right now, prices are very high. Well, here is to you, sir."

Doc Sargent drank quickly, and sent his glass spinning down the polished bar-top.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"I am fifty-five years of age, and I have never been more serious in my whole life."

"I guess the deal is off," said Doc.

"I am perfectly satisfied," nodded Henry. "Good-day, sir."

As he turned to walk away, a man came into the saloon. He was tall, swarthy and handsome, dressed entirely in black, from his patent-leather boots to his big Stetson sombrero. His black hair was brushed with silver at the temples.

Doc Sargent had walked away from the bar, but had turned and was staring at the tall newcomer. Finally he said:

"So you are the Borden who bought the Smoke Tree mine, eh? *Nick* Borden. I wondered."

The tall man laughed, showing a flash of white teeth.

"Why not, Doc?" he asked casually. "Any law against it?"

"No, I guess not, Nick. Did somebody salt it on you?"

"No, I don't reckon so. If they did, they sure salted it deep, because

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we've opened a mighty rich vein today. Call up the boys—and girls, too. I'm buyin' the drinks."

"All right, Nick; that's fine. Say, I want you to meet Henry Conroy, the sheriff. Sheriff, this Nick Borden."

Borden gave Henry's hand a hearty shake.

"I've heard about you, Conroy," he boomed. "We'll probably see a lot of each other."

"Very likely," said Doc dryly.

Borden gave Doc a sharp glance, and his lips tightened for a moment. The crowd was moving in for a free drink, and Borden laughed softly as he turned to face the bar.

"This is on Nick Borden," announced Doc. "They've just made a strike on the Smoke Tree."

"Forget the strike," said Borden. "I'm merely buyin' a drink."

AFTER the drink, Henry slipped quietly out and went to the office, where he found Judge half-asleep at the desk.

"Did you make a sale?" queried Judge.

"I made very little progress," admitted Henry, sitting down on Oscar Johnson's cot.

"Did you find out anything?"

"Yes, I found one thing, Judge."

"What was that, Henry?"

"That I am crazy."

"Well—of course," nodded Judge.

"Kind of you," sighed Henry. "Judge, in your migrations over this land of wide-open spaces, did you ever hear of a man named Nick Borden?"

"Eh? Nick Borden? Why, yes, I have, Henry. In fact— What about him?"

"I just met him at the Tonto. He owns the Smoke Tree mine."

"Well, well! So he's a mine owner. The last time— Let me see-e-e. It was twelve years ago that I defended him. Yes, I believe it was. He was charged with train robbery. Cleared him with a perfect alibi. The day after the robbery, he spent the day with an ignorant old German who was working on a prospect.

"Impressing the old man with the fact that it was Sunday, they spent the day playing cards and drinking Nick's whisky. The German swore to this in court, and Nick was acquitted, because it would have been impossible for him to have robbed the train and still be at the German's claim on Sunday. Luckily"—Judge smiled slowly—"no one thought to ask the German how he knew it was Sunday."

"In that event," mused Henry, "I do not believe that Mr. Borden will improve the morals of Tonto City."

"Nor corrupt them," added Judge. "As a matter of fact, where are the morals of Tonto City, Henry? Are they something like a flag, which is paraded on the Fourth of July, and fed to the moths the rest of the year? Consider Mr. West, who is destined to be our leading citizen. He became wealthy through—hm-m-m-m. Henry, that poor devil of a prospector who blasted himself off this mortal coil was named Parke Neal, was he not? Parke Neal. Why, damn it, Henry, that same Parke Neal was Jack West's partner in the Three Partners mine!"

"Am I supposed to say 'Ah-h-h-h!' and show my tonsils?" queried Henry.

"That's true—you wouldn't know," replied Judge soberly. "There was a third partner, too. It is rather vague, after twenty years, but there *was* a third partner. I believe he disappeared—in some way.

"Rumor has it that West forced

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Neal to play poker for the Three Partners and stacked the deck. West made a million or so. Apparently no one in the country knew anything about the richness of the Three Partners until West made the sale."

"A great mind—apparently," observed Henry.

"Don't forget that cold deck."

"True—we must not forget that cold deck."

"And," added Judge, "unless my memory plays me false, there is no love lost between Jack West and Nick Borden. Borden is not a mining man. At least, I never heard that he was."

"As far as that is concerned," replied Henry, "if you were to ask any member of the theatrical profession their opinion of me as a sheriff—and yet, I am a sheriff, you know, Judge."

"And," observed Judge, "as far as that is concerned, why bother searching for one of your former profession? Query any man in this county."

"Am I *that* bad, Judge?"

"I never like to flatter any man," replied Judge. "But, Henry, you are, or have been, referred to as the Shame of Arizona. They say you can't ride, you can't shoot— Well, why go any further?"

"In other words?" queried Henry soberly.

"They are laughing at you, sir."

"The bad men, too, Judge?"

"Every last one of them."

"At last!" exclaimed Henry. "For fifty years I tried to make the world laugh. I never was a real success, no matter how hard I tried. And now, in the late autumn of my life, I find myself cast in a real comedy rôle. I am merely Henry Harrison Conroy, sheriff of Tonto—and the whole damn State of Arizona is laughing. I am a success!"

"Henry, have you been at that jug of prune juice?" asked Judge.

"Not even once—but I have a distinct leaning, Judge."

"I feel myself about to gravitate," said Judge. "Frijole did well on that last batch."

NICK BORDEN sat at a rough table in his cabin at the Smoke Tree, a solitaire layout spread before him. A half-smoked cigar was clenched between his white teeth, a scowl between his eyes. Placing the deck of cards on the table, he leaned back in his chair, looking at the closed door. There was a Colt revolver on the table, and after a moment of indecision he placed the gun beside his right thigh, where it was partly covered by the rough cushion.

"Bring him in!" he called curtly.

The door swung open to admit Tom Silver, the scar-faced man, while behind him came a tall, hard-faced man, dressed in rough cowboy clothes, who had a gun in his right hand.

Borden looked sharply at the scar-faced man, indicated a chair, and motioned for the other man to stay at the door.

Tom Silver sat down. "What's the idea of the gun-play?" he asked. "I walk up here to yore cabin, and get a gun stuck in my ribs."

Nick Borden laughed shortly.

"Yo're the swamper at the Tonto, I believe. I couldn't very well mistake that face."

"I didn't come here to talk about my face, Borden."

"You work for Jack West."

"Suppose I do—what of it?"

"Sort of a tough hombre, eh? Yuh better cool off—this ain't the Tonto."

"I don't like to have guns stuck in my ribs."

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"Then keep away from places where yo're not wanted."

"I might be wanted here, Borden."

"Yuh might, eh? Just what the hell did yuh come here for; and who are yuh?"

The scar-faced Silver looked keenly at Borden for moments.

"Borden, do you remember the old days around Maricopa—twenty years ago?"

"Twenty years ago? Suppose I do."

"Do yuh remember Tom Silver?"

"Tom Silver? Silver. Why, yeah, I remember there was a Tom Silver. Disappeared, if I remember correctly. What about him, feller?"

"I'm Tom Silver."

NICK BORDEN leaned forward, looking keenly at Silver's face.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"Joke?"

"Yeah—joke. You're no more Tom Silver than I am."

"Do you remember what Silver looked like?"

"Well, kinda."

"Uh-huh. 'Bout my size, black hair, good-lookin'."

"Yeah, that's right, feller. Thinkin' about him causes me to remember him pretty well. Yeah, he had black hair—and if I remember correctly, he was good-lookin'. What's yore game, feller?"

"I'm Tom Silver. No, wait a minute. I went to the penitentiary for twenty years, Borden. A dynamite blast almost killed me. We was doin' some prison road work. That twenty-year stretch ain't no fountain of youth—and when yuh add a dynamite blast in yore face—"

"What was you sent up for?"

"Murderin' a man named Condon, in Yuma."

"Condon? Condon. It seems to me that I remember somethin' about that. But yore name wasn't connected with it—not Tom Silver."

"I went by the name of Tom Jones."

"I see," muttered Borden thoughtfully. "But what are yuh doin' here, Silver; and why come to me?"

"I came here to kill Parke Neal."

"The hell yuh did! Well, a dynamite blast—"

"I know; I was there when he died."

"This is all Greek to me, Silver. Why did you want to kill Neal?"

"I thought I was shootin' Neal—when I shot Condon. I thought Neal was stealin' my wife—there in Maricopa. I reckon Neal told me the truth, when he was dyin'. It wasn't Neal—it was Jack West."

"It's beginnin' to get a little clearer, Silver. So West stole yore wife. Has he still got her?"

"I don't know," replied Silver grimly.

"Figurin' on killin' Jack West?"

"Not until I've made him pay me damn well."

"Oh, he owes yuh somethin', does he?"

"Listen to me, Borden. I happen to know that yo're no friend to Jack West. If yuh was, I wouldn't be here. Remember the Three Partners mine?"

"Who doesn't—in this State?"

"Me and Parke Neal and Jack West discovered that mine, Borden. That is, me and Neal found it; West was too damn lazy to prospect. We was down to our last dollar when we struck it. My wife was in Maricopa, and a baby was comin' soon. We sent West out to record the claim. He got drunk

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and didn't show up; so we finished the grub and came back.

"I reckon I had too many drinks, and I went home, where I seen Parke Neal give my wife two hundred dollars. They didn't know I seen 'em. I tore the money out of my wife's hands and went out of there, trailin' Parke Neal. He went to Yuma, and I follered. Well, I killed the wrong man—and got caught.

"Borden, Neal told me that West stole his interest in that mine. I've been to Maricopa, and I've seen that old record. Jack West recorded it in his name alone. Damn him, he not only stole my wife, but he stole my third of the Three Partners mine."

"Well, that's quite a story," said Borden slowly. "I've often wondered where West got the name for that mine. Three Partners. You and Neal and West. And yo're workin' for West now."

"I'm as close to him as I can get, Borden."

"I see. But just why did you come to me, Silver?"

"I jist figured that we might be able to help each other."

Borden laughed shortly.

"How could you help me?" he asked curiously.

"By workin' for a man you don't like, Borden. Oh, I know; you're a mine owner—and all that. But you never came to Wild Horse Valley to dig rocks. If yuh happen to need me—or information—I'll be down there rasslin' spittoons and sweepin' up torn cards. *Adios.*"

BORDEN nodded to the tall cowboy, who stepped aside and let Tom Silver out. Borden looked curiously at the cowboy and smiled thoughtfully.

"I'd shore hate to have a face like that," said the cowboy.

"Yeah, it would be kinda unfortunate," agreed Borden.

"Did yuh believe his story, Nick?"

"Sure; I knew most of it."

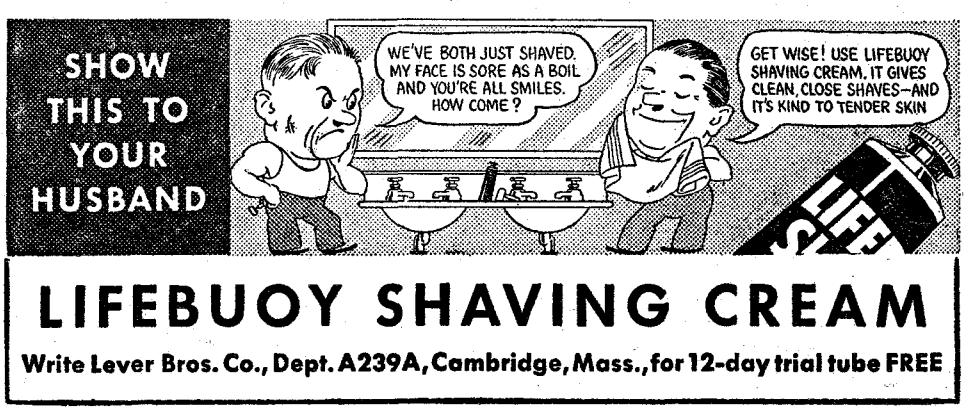
Borden swept up the solitaire layout and shuffled the cards slowly.

"Lobo," he said, "I never expected to have a man workin' for Jack West—not even a swamper. *Viva la escupidera!*"

The tall cowboy laughed as he started to roll a cigarette. "I've heard the Mexes cheer 'most everythin', but that's the first *viva* I've ever heard for a cuspidor."

Borden laughed and tossed the cards aside.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK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WONDERS OF THE WORLD

The OLYMPIAN JUPITER

"A SIGHT TO MAKE A MAN FORGET HIS TROUBLES"

SOME time about 460 B.C., the Greeks dedicated in the sacred grove of the valley of Olympia a temple to the gods, in the center of which was to be a gigantic statue of Zeus. The renowned sculptor Phidias and his pupils erected the temple with Doric columns and spared no cost or materials in casting the central statue.

Zeus was a benignant and noble figure seated on a throne at one end of the temple's main hall. His robes and sandals were sculptured in gold, his body in ivory. Resting on his head was a wreath of olive leaves. In one of his hands he carried a symbol of victory made of ivory and gold. In the other hand was a scepter curiously adorned with precious metals and sparkling jewels. The throne was of blue. So impressive was the spectacle of the figure that one famous writer described it as "a sight to make a man forget his troubles."

In 408 B.C. the temple and statue were damaged by fire, but fortunately, before that time, many historians had described it in their records, and artists had reproduced it on coins. The later history of the statue is lost in uncertainty. Probably the figure perished during one of the earthquakes at Olympia.

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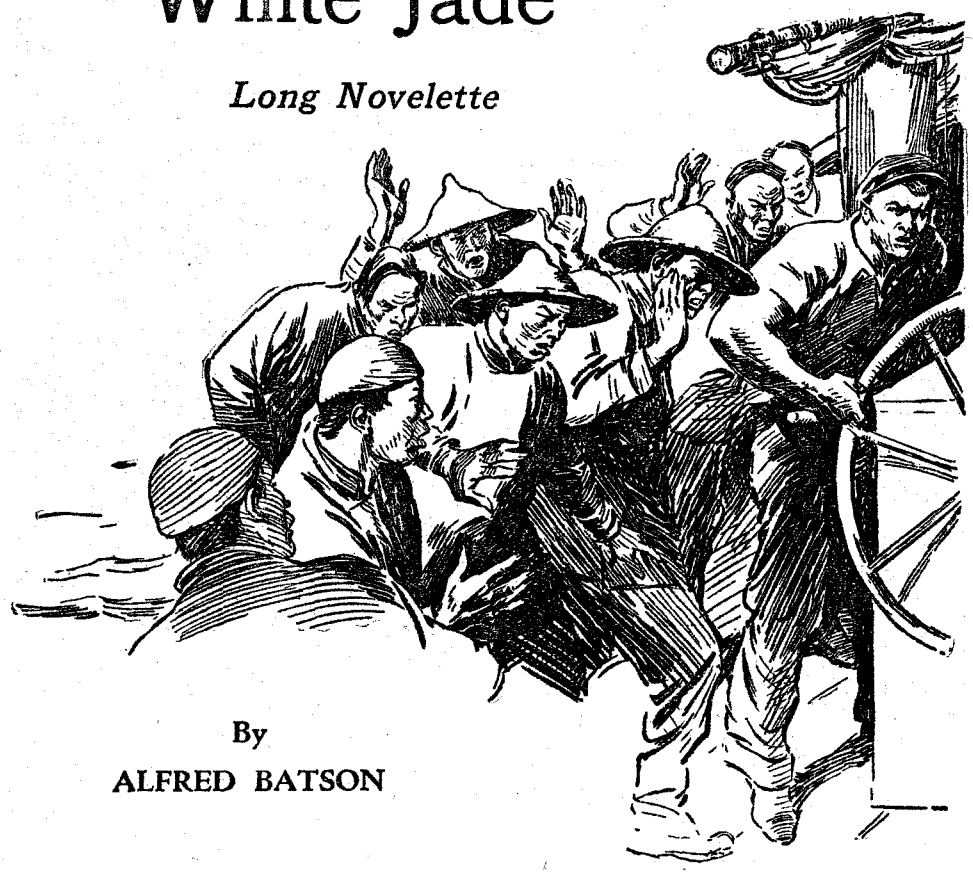
White Jade

Long Novelette



By
ALFRED BATSON

When a Jap, a Chinese and an American all scheme for a fabulous stake, there's no telling the outcome

CHAPTER I.

"DEEP WATER" PARKER.

FROM his place on the landing stage, Parker glued his eyes on the sampan moored in mid-river at the steamer's rail. When a broad shouldered, bronzed figure clambered wearily down from the deck and stepped aboard the smaller boat, he frowned, spat into the yellow, silt-filled Yangtze and turned away, his breath giving out a long sigh of frustration. He knew the answer before his partner brought it ashore.

If Bill Scott, with his infectious smile and youthful persuasiveness, could not promote a trip on the cuff—then nobody could. The smile and the easy manner behind it had done the trick before from the Singapore dock job to the breakwater at Vladivostok but this turn-down had no precedent in the seriousness of its aftermath.

Being broke on the Coast was bad enough, but a thousand miles up-river

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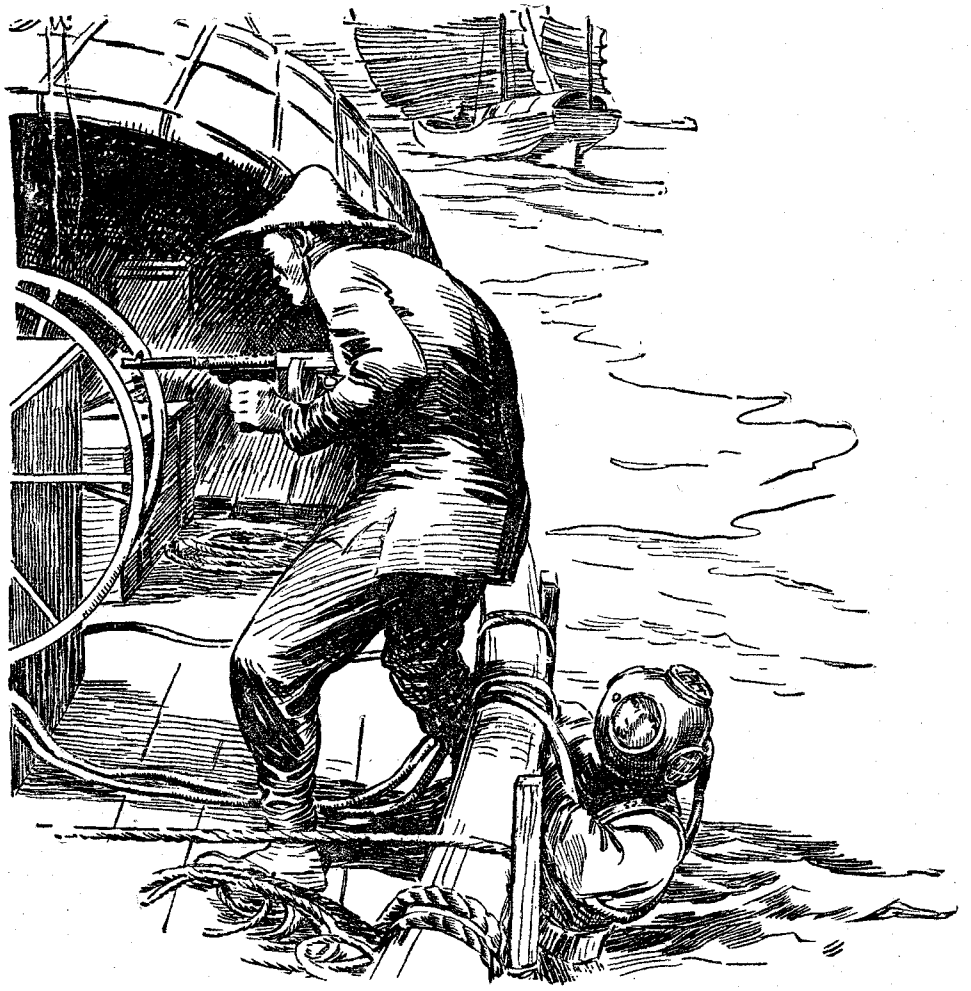

Desperately, the coolie held them off

in depression-paralyzed Ichang, and this, the first boat to appear in a year, the first chance of escape, and to have it fall flat—it was a new low in bad luck. Perhaps now Scott would drop his quest for adventure and go back to the Shanghai sheet he'd left to follow the up-today down-tomorrow life of a diver west of Honolulu. It was all right for a man long used to it by necessity, but for a twenty-five year old kid with a college education...!

Parker took a turn about the brief jetty waiting for Scott to come ashore with the bad news. Though the sun had nearly set, the still air hung breathlessly hot. He looked out on the broad expanse of churning current, and shading his eyes squinted up-river but found no encouragement in the deserted ship anchorage. Behind him a taut, brooding inertia lay over the city.

It was all familiar, had been for a year. The only change was that the Yangtze was more shallow than ever before, according to pilot book figures.

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Ships weren't braving the rapids unless a cargo was waiting at Chungking; but with the silver situation and the Communist menace in Chengtu—finding a cargo was out of the question.

His eyes rested on his old-style Morse helmet, his thick rubber suit, the long coils of hose and other paraphernalia of his equipment. He found little consolation in recalling the high pay—percentage job that had brought him and young Scott up from Shanghai, then fizzled when the Communists appeared, the native employers welshing on the contract and skipping overnight.

The depression had followed and river trade was dead beyond any hope of revival.

He grimaced, looked up. The sampan had left the steamer and was coming down on the stream like an express train. A hundred yards above the landing steps the *lodah* flicked the sweep with a twist of his wrist, the craft swerved broadside, caught the upcurrent against the bank and wafted in so gently it wouldn't have broken an egg.

Scott stepped out, drew a Mex from his pocket, kissed it, and tossed it over. The *lodah* grinned, the sampan dropped back in the swirl.

"He's a Jap," Scott shook a thumb toward the steamer; "wouldn't take us down with the dunnage unless he got his money on the line."

"Jap, eh?" Parker grumbled. "Wonder why he's so secretive about it? Why doesn't he paint his flag on the stack the way the others do—when there are any others?" he added with a trace of mockery.

Scott went on unheeding. He spread his hands in a gesture of despair. "I tried everything, couldn't move him. Afraid it's back to the Reverend Scroggs and the same old missionary chow, boss."

"Scroggs gave me the fishy eye this morning," Parker cut him off. "Suggested he'd fed us long enough."

"Underfed us," Scott amended with a grin. "If it hadn't been for old Kwoh, we'd have starved."

"Can't blame him, carried us a long time. What makes it worse," Parker feigned a laugh, "that Mex I gave you was the last." He had been leading up to something and he thought the kid's good humor was the signal to broach it. "You're about fed up after reading the sky pilot's library, aren't you?"

"Read every book in it twice," Scott laughed. "I could write a history of China . . ."

"Why don't you get out of there tonight," Parker pointed to the steamer, "stow away . . . when they find you tomorrow you'll be half way to Hankow."

"Blow," Scott's eyes narrowed, "run out on you, leave you here . . . ?"

"SURE, be smart," Parker had difficulty saying. "Go back to Shanghai and get your job back, get on your feet . . ."

"Hell, no," Scott exploded. "I came up on a gamble and I'll stay with you, boss. Wouldn't I be a fine one to walk out just because the going's rough?"

"But, youngster, in Shanghai, you'd be safe and your chow . . ."

"Who wants to be safe? I could have stayed in New York if I wanted that. Hell, boss, I thought you knew me better . . ." He turned away. After a moment his voice softened. "How about Kwoh, he's a white Chinese. Suppose he'd lend us enough to get to Hankow? Maybe we could sell the outfit there and—"

Parker scowled. Antiquated as his

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equipment was, he hated the thought of parting with it, doubted that he could. He alone knew its limitations. A foreigner would laugh at its many patches. A Chinese might go down in it but would need good joss to come up.

Only he understood how to coddle it for the one more job that was to snare him the pot at the end of the rainbow but somehow never did. Like his own creaking joints the suit was showing its age. It was a deathtrap for the lower Yangtze where the river was deep, but above Hankow it would suffice in a pinch. Still, finding a buyer was a thought, however painful. His reply was a suppressed gulp.

He was turning away when something in the river caught his attention, held it in a vise. His eyes riveted through the falling dusk on a sampan coming from the steamer, heading for the landing steps. It carried a huddled group forward and a single, aloof passenger aft. He appeared smaller than the others, his skin a darker yellow, his cheek bones higher.

Parker's fists clenched but he said nothing. What caused his breath to stop was that the man was studying him and his equipment through field glasses. The American stared, saw that the mouth under the glasses was narrow, compressed, evil. Suddenly it parted, the lips moved. The *lodah* bent the sweep and the course was changed to the bank farther down-river.

After a moment the sampan grounded on the foreshore. There was a haggling over the price. The *lodah* protested vehemently. The short man grunted an order, someone stooped, picked up a rock and hurled it. Quickly the *lodah* pushed off, caught the current and sped whining out of range. The group laughed, taunted, moved up the bank, the short one pausing at the top to stare back at the two Americans. Suddenly he cleared his throat and spat toward them.

". . . looks like that Jap devil, Abata," Scott's voice cut the stillness, brought Parker back to reality. "What's he doing up here? I didn't see him on the ship."

Parker's voice was grimly intent. "They were Chinese . . ."

"Right. But the little one was a Jap. It's your old friend or I miss my guess." He took a hitch in his belt. "Japs and elephants don't forget and after that trimming you gave him . . ."

"He cut my hose . . ."

"Sure, and the other divers blackballed him for it. But we're not in Shanghai now, boss; anything can happen up here and no questions asked. He's mean enough to . . ."

PARKER stood fixedly looking into the distance. After a time he shrugged, moved away. "I'm going to see Kwoh, maybe I can promote some dough. He wouldn't like it if you made the touch, make him lose 'face.' He knows I'm Number One. You stay here with the stuff."

He went up to the eerily lit Bund. Scott's eyes followed the compactly knit body, noticed the fading spring in the step and the graying hair. But these outward manifestations of age were deceptive to the uninitiated, as Scott had seen demonstrated more than once. He smiled at the recollection.

Parker might be broke and getting along in years but the heart behind the barrel chest was still youthful, and the powerful shoulders retained their steeled muscles. "'Deep Water Parker' to wind up in a dead town like this . . ." he summed it up.

A noise on the river distracted him.

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A junk was swerving under the steamer's counter. A winch screeched and a heavy packing case was lifted over the side, lowered to the waiting arms of a crowd of coolies thronging the junk's deck. Scott's eyes probed the darkness. His breath came in short jerks.

Another case followed. A third. Suddenly a thought struck him, stretched his curiosity to the limit. A sixth sense told him those cases contained diving equipment. But there were no diving jobs in Ichang.

And Abata? Why was he arriving? Scott pursed his lips, shrugged.

He bent down to a large box beside him and brought out an iron pump handle. Grasping it he paced back and forth, watching the junk. Something was up and the diabolically clever, crack Jap diver had a hand in it. If Abata ran true to form the pump handle would come in handy.

Kwoh glanced up as the door slammed behind Parker. He sprang around the counter and rushed to him.

"I have look see you," he said, "I no can find. Where you go?"

Parker was not listening. He was wondering if the three nondescript, long-gowned figures, who had followed him through the dark confines of Golden Phoenix Alley and paused to look in a window as he entered the tea shop, had resumed the trail.

His answer came a moment after the waddling, bland-faced Kwoh had pushed him onto a bench and put a steaming bowl of tea before him. The door opened and they filed in, looking not at him but straight ahead. They were tall, heavily built, less swarthy than most Hupeh men. Hands buried deep in their sleeves, they moved to a table at one side. An intense preoccupation kept them whispering among themselves. They paid such little attention to Parker that he knew he was being watched. He didn't like their looks. They were *ronins*, wharf coolies, loafers, the most vicious criminal type in China.

KWOH was too excited to notice the American's all inclusive survey.

"You have got more far-down-river suit . . .?"

Parker sat up, a flush coming into his face. "Have I got the diving gear? Yes, I got it, all of it."

"Ah yah," the Chinese slapped his back. "I have got man. He wantchee you . . ." He waggled a hand under the table, was at a loss for words.

"You got a job?" Parker almost yelled, forgetting pidgin English.

"Have got, have got," the fat face wreathed in a grin. He got up and waddled behind the counter. Parker arose and followed, sitting at a table at one side of the bar. Kwoh returned with a smudged card. Parker read: "Tung Shan Hotel—509."

"He's there?" Parker asked. The Chinese nodded. "I'll see him chop chop. Can he talk English?"

"Number One."

"Good." Suddenly Parker hesitated. "What's he want? Haven't had a wreck here in two years! No ships have been coming up."

"I no savvy. He come this side yes'day, talkee me he wantchee walla walla you, 'Melican man can go more far down river. He have got cash . . ."

"Cash is what I need," Parker grinned. "He b'long Ichang?"

"No." Kwoh waved a hand toward the interior. "He come more far, mebbe he come . . ."

The voice trailed off. He half arose. The three long-gowned natives had

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come forward and were standing at the bar, close to Parker's elbow. A sudden mistrust clouded Kwoh's face. He had caught something in their whispering. Parker got to his feet, there was a jostling and a bottle crashed to the floor.

"Sorry," the American said, "if I did it." He glanced up into venom filled eyes.

"*Yang kwei tzu,*" one of them hissed, reaching a hand into his sleeve.

In the quick retort, Parker saw the ruse. He had not knocked over the bottle, he had been bumped into for a purpose. The familiar curse, "kill the foreign devil," convinced him their tailing was intentional. A hand snatched the lapel of his coat. It gave, ripped down the front.

His mind functioned with lightning-like rapidity. He whirled, sprang for the corner. Pulling a table after him he edged behind it and roared for them to come on. He had no time to go into the why of it all when the maelstrom struck.

Heads down, arms flailing, voices screaming invectives, the trio launched into the attack of their own provoking. Simultaneously a tea bowl was thrown and the single bulb overhead was blotted out. A meat cleaver swished through the air. The American caught its glint, ducked. It hit the brick wall behind him and clattered dully to the floor. In that split second his muscles tensed. He knew that in mid-China a foreigner met fire with fire or was overwhelmed. Giving an inch meant giving everything.

HIS hand shot out, grasped the neck of an empty beer bottle on the bar. His arm swung in a short arc and the bottle shattered with a crunching thud on the shaven pate nearest him. As clearly as though the room had been lighted he saw the man's ebony eyes roll white at the stunning impact. He felt the body slither off the table and wilt to the floor.

The second was on him, arms around the graying head, fingers groping for the blue eyes. Parker knocked him off with a vicious jab to the groin and a curdling, ghastly yell brought momentary quiet to the din-filled room.

The third gained the tabletop in a simian-like leap. His thickly booted foot missed the American's face but his hands clawed Parker's neck with a savagery that brought blood. A knee landed with such crushing force against Parker's face that he was forced back. The second crawled under the table and pinioned his legs. Parker toppled backward. He was enmeshed in a tangled, snarling mass. The table fell.

Probing thumbs sought for his windpipe. A knuckle crept with numbing pressure against the nerve center at the base of his neck. His legs, sprawling sideways, found a cleared space. He drew up his knees, shot them out, rolled at the same instant and the thumbs were jerked loose, the blood flowed back into his head. He half arose, drew a deep breath. Dimly he made out a snaggle toothed face and smashed a fist into it.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the front of the shop, shouts, running feet, Kwoh's shrill voice. Two of Parker's assailants scrambled to their feet, leaped out of his encircling arms and vanished phantom-like in the confusion. The third lay supine.

"Damn you two," Parker grunted, "why'd you quit?"

Someone struck a match and he saw Kwoh with three soldiers. The shop coolie was mounting a chair with a

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fresh bulb. The light blazed and Parker looked down at his tattered, blood stained shirt. He felt of the hard knot below his right eye and grinned. Then he glanced at the faintly stirring Chinese on the floor and laughed. The soldiers laughed with him.

Kwoh found nothing amusing in the débris.

"Who man you fightie fightie?"

"I don't know," Parker said, "they started it. But I'm going to find out what's it all about."

He grasped the inert form by the collar and pulled it erect. The soldiers and Kwoh moved in.

One of the soldiers puffed a cigarette. Without warning he jabbed it against the loafer's hand. The man shrank back, screamed.

"None of that," Parker said.

The soldier looked at him in bewilderment. The American's protest was beyond his understanding. He jabbed again. Parker motioned Kwoh to tell him to lay off. Kwoh translated. But proof of what he could expect had been planted in the loafer's mind. He crowded against the bar and whined.

"Why did he and his friends jump me?"

Kwoh put the question. After a heated exchange the answer came.

"Some man have pay twenty cash."

"Was it a Chinese?"

ANOTHER gesticulating jabber. The soldiers were following the conversation from Kwoh's translating. The man was adamantine. The cigarette ground into his neck. He howled, begged for mercy and talked.

"No Chinese, monkey man, Yap."

Kwoh went on that the trio had never seen their employer before, he had come up on the boat. They had been paid to put the American out of the way because the Jap had said white skinned foreigners were enemies of China, the foreigner was an old man, they wouldn't have any trouble.

Parker's mind was a turmoil of confusion. If the Jap had been Abata after all, as Scott had suspected, then these reasons for the attack were piffle. There was more to it—much more. Parker realized that to make an issue of the episode would be to put Abata on guard.

Better do nothing and play a waiting game.

The soldiers were for taking the loafer to jail. Parker knew what that meant. They'd get him outside and threaten his life unless cash was paid over. Whether it was or not he'd be locked up.

Parker wasn't out for revenge. Beyond a gashed cheek he hadn't suffered much. He looked on the brawl as more of a work-out, one he'd needed. And if his suspicions were correct, the loafers had given him a tip.

"Tell him to pay for the damage, give the soldiers a dollar each and I won't make any complaint," he said to Kwoh.

The terror-stricken face lighted. Avidly the man pulled out a thin roll of bills, gave several to Kwoh and one each to the soldiers. They set up a yell. One crashed his rifle butt down on the loafer's foot. The others grabbed the roll, distributed it and called for *samshu* and cigars. Then they booted him out the door.

Suddenly Parker felt of the card in his pocket.

A flush came into his cheeks. Getting up he told Kwoh he'd be back in the morning.

Was there a link between the crack Jap diver's sudden appearance and the

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job the tea shop proprietor had put him on? He'd soon know.

CHAPTER II.

SECRET EXPEDITION.

HE turned out of the alley, stopping now and then to smile at the curious natives who jabbered excitedly, pointed to the lump on his face, his torn suit. He certainly was a mess and nobody knew it better than he did. Still, he could laugh about it. That proved he wasn't as old as he sometimes felt.

The thought cheered him. He needed cheering, if not for himself, for young Scott. He couldn't let a fine kid like that fool around much longer up-river. Scott ought to get out, back to the States, get a girl . . .

Well, perhaps here were the means. He was in front of the Tung Shan. He went in the door and showed the clerk his card. The clerk nodded, beckoned. Parker followed him up stairs and waited as he rapped on a door. There was a movement inside and the clerk left. A moment later the door opened.

"My name is Tang. I presume you are Mr. Parker, the American diver?"

The hulking coolie stepped back and the man in the cushioned chair arose, shook hands with himself Chinese fashion, bowed and motioned Parker to a seat.

His courteous smile revealed stained teeth. He was neither tall nor short but there was an air of muscular strength about him. He moved with the grace of a feline, silently, assuredly. His rich silk long-gown rustled against the decrepit furniture in the garish hotel room.

Parker saw on second glance that though he smiled the good humor was evident only in his mouth; his eyes were hard, flint-like, glinting specks of black in an expanse of yellow flesh. A scar ran down the side of his temple and lost itself under his high white collar. Despite his appearance, he had grace, charm. He was obviously a Chinese gentleman of the old school but there was a vague, unnameable something about him that made Parker apprehensive. He could not have told why.

"Yes, I'm Parker. Glad to know you, Mr. Tang."

"The pleasure is all mine, my friend. I apologize for being found in such poor surroundings but it is all the wretched city affords." There was a momentary pause. The towering coolie stood waiting. Tang nodded and with a searching glance at Parker, the servant disappeared in an inner room.

"You will pardon the way I stare at you but your attire . . . you seem disheveled . . ."

Parker laughed. "I had words with some loafers."

The black eyes slitted, the voice caught. Tang glanced away and spoke over his shoulder. "A row about handling your equipment, perhaps?" It was more a question than a statement.

"That was behind it," Parker said. "Wharf coolies . . . they jumped me in a tea house."

"It is deplorable that in my unfortunate country we have not a police force capable of protecting foreign visitors." Suddenly he hesitated. The brown teeth appeared in a grin. "I take it you cared for yourself capably."

"I did my best."

"Hmmm, it is well. You seem capable of 'most anything; that is the kind of man I need—like," he corrected himself. To cover his embar-

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rassment he went on hastily. "Before we talk business cannot we observe the amenities by having tea? The subject I have to bring up is a painful one for me. Will you indulge me in this kindness?"

"By all means," Parker said.

THE yellow eyelids flicked, the coolie appeared on the instant, without being bidden, and Tang gave instructions.

Parker lolled back in his chair and studied his host. He thought that in his twelve years in China he had never seen a native so observant of the hoary customs.

Here was the indolent ease of age-old Cathay, the wish to talk anything but the business which might bring two men together. The American knew it all revolved around that undefinable, ingrained propriety, "face."

Before the matter in hand could be mentioned, Tang must first show himself as acquainted with the tradition of his caste. That he pecked delicately at an ear with a finger wrapped in the sheerest of silk handkerchiefs was no blot on his charm. He did it with an air. It seemed to Parker he did everything with an air, even to transferring his attention to his nostrils after his ears were finished. These were habits few foreigners could understand.

The tea was brought. Parker pushed aside the steaming chrysanthemum bud and drank. Tang did likewise, smacking his lips loudly in appreciation. He talked of the weather, the beauties of the Yangtze Gorge country and the subtle delicacy of white jade, no green for him, that was for less discerning collectors, for neophytes.

"Do you know anything about white jade?" he asked suddenly.

"Not a thing, save that it's more valuable than green," Parker said. "I'm just a plain diver."

"Ah," Tang sank back in his chair, a smile wreathing his blissfully peaceful countenance. After a moment he stirred, a frown appeared. Hastily he got up, rummaged in a foreign style suitcase. "I know Chinese cigarettes aren't preferred by foreigners," he apologized, "fortunately I have these." He extended an unopened package. Parker thanked him, ripped the seal. It had been a year since he'd enjoyed an American smoke. After he had held a match, Tang sat back at ease, lighted a native cigarette for himself and blew gray clouds through his nose in lazy enjoyment.

"First," he said, "I should like to tell you a little something about myself. You may wonder at my command of English. I am from Sian in Shensi Province. Perhaps you have heard of the Central Mission College there . . ." he raced on before Parker could reply. "I was educated by missionaries, I have them weekly to dine at my home, hence I speak English fairly well."

"Excellently," Parker interrupted, "excellently," he added for emphasis.

"I am in the herb business," Tang went on, "and have made some little success. I came to Ichang only yesterday from my home and was fortunate in finding you here.

"The proprietor of the tea shop told me about you..."

"You came from Sian yesterday and just stumbled over me?"

"But naturally, how else could I get here?" A brief frown hung on the yellow forehead. "Sian is in the north; we have no water transportation to the Yangtze."

"Of course," Parker said. "I had an idea you'd come up from Shanghai.

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I thought someone down there had told you I was here."

"I HAVEN'T been in Shanghai in ten years." The black eyes glinted in a smile. He sighed, sipped daintily at his tea. Parker sat back satisfied and he went on. "We Chinese have a custom that one should revere the memory of his ancestors and it is because of them that you are in this room."

"Your ancestors?"

"Precisely. My ancestors are better known to you perhaps as the Tang dynasty, we ruled China from the sixth to the ninth century. With advancing years I am inclined to revert more to the customs of my forbears. . . . Have you ever heard of the ship Fatshan?"

"Often," Parker said. "She went down in the rapids about twelve years ago."

"Ah, you know then. That is fortunate. She met her untimely end in the Pao Tzu T'an—that is Sunken Rock Rapid in English—a short hundred miles from here. Do you think you could locate the wreck?"

"Easily."

"Good."

"But the safe was brought up a few years ago," Parker put in. "I remember when it happened. I was working on the Wampoa dock at Shanghai . . ."

"Oh, it is not the safe that interests me." Tang raised a deprecatory hand. "I am not a thief, Mr. Parker, but an honorable business man. The safe belongs to the owners. When she went down my father was on board bringing to Shanghai for safe keeping the scrolls giving the lineage—what you call the family tree—of the Tang family. The old gentleman was afraid to put them in the safe and kept them in his cabin. Unfortunately they were lost with him. They are in waterproof containers and it should not be difficult . . ."

"You want me to find them?" Parker interrupted.

"That is correct. The scrolls are in long copper tubes, about two to three feet long and six to eight inches in circumference. They were leaded at the ends and should be in perfect condition. You understand it is because of my ancestors I am interested. Would two hundred gold dollars a day be fair, with a two week guarantee and some pay in advance?"

Parker caught his breath. The job was easier than he'd dared hope. With the river low, no decompression worries, no ships running, the Pao Tzu well away from villages and curious crowds of sampan-folk—it was a cinch. But the price Tang was offering, that was what sent the blood pounding into his temples. It was treble the salary he could make in Shangai, and the job would be without the deep water dangers of the Wangpoo.

"I want to be fair and warn you," he spoke up, "the Pao Tzu has a swift current and the stuff you want may have been washed down. Two weeks . . ."

"That is all right, that is all right," the Chinese plunged on. "If the two weeks are not enough, poof, what is it? I want the scrolls, and your wages will continue at the same rate . . ."

PARKER nodded. He was not paying close attention. There were one or two features of the story that struck him as not hanging together—Tang's English vocabulary, certainly more extensive than that of the average missionary school gradu-

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ate, and the odd coincidence that he should come blindly to Ichang, needing a diver and accidentally finding one. And why was he going to such lengths to justify himself?

Parker looked up into a pudgy fist holding a roll of bills. The sight of the money decided him. Here was the escape for him and Scott. Here was a comfortable lay-up in Shanghai until a steady job appeared. On closer retrospect Tang seemed honest enough. Parker decided his doubts were the result of a too vivid imagination. He reached out and took the money.

"Then it's a deal, Mr. Tang. I'll go up for you . . ."

"Ah, good. *We'll* go up," Tang corrected. "I'd like to watch you work. We can start in the morning getting whatever you need. The tea shop proprietor can put us in the way of chartering a junk and crew. I will supervise."

"I have my pump man, a young American," Parker said.

The corners of Tang's mouth dropped. "Must he be with you?"

"He's the only man I'd trust on the other end of my hose," Parker spoke with finality.

There was a tense pause. At that precise moment the coolie entered and began removing the tea things. Tang's eyes rested on his broad back, his biceps. The smile reappeared. "Of course, bring your pump man; we'll be a jolly party."

Parker nodded. Tang smiled. The interview was over.

As Parker got up to leave Tang's hand fell on his sleeve. "There's one thing I almost overlooked," he said. "Please do no talk about this to anyone. You know of the great drive being made in China to put aside such old customs as revering one's ancestors. If news of this should get out people would not understand and might give us trouble."

"All right, Mr. Tang," Parker said. "I won't say a word."

He went out, the Chinese's smiling eyes boring into his. Behind, in the room, stood the coolie, his lips tightly compressed as he stared after Parker. The door closed without a sound.

Parker turned out of the Tung Shan lobby and headed for the landing jetty and Scott. His mind was a confused jumble of doubts. But suddenly he felt of the roll of bills. He shrugged, laughed outright and braced his shoulders. It was crazy to doubt Tang, especially when he had two hundred dollars of Tang's money. It was queer about these rich Chinese and their eccentricities. Tang had paid him in advance for one of the easiest jobs of his career. There was more money coming. His luck was changing.

He plunged his hands in his pockets, found the American cigarettes. He brought them out, stepped under a street light and was putting one in his mouth when his eye fell on a stamp on the package. It bore the imprint of the Astor House Hotel in Shanghai. The date was eight days before!

For a moment his face clouded. Then he smiled. What the hell, they might have come up on the ship from Hankow. And after all, he had actual money in his pocket. That was what counted most.

He went on, too preoccupied to notice a swarthy, cloaked figure following him at a distance.

THE night was balmy with a faint breeze. A huge moon hung behind Pyramid Hill. The landing jetty was deserted when Parker reached it.

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He realized he had been away too long for Scott to wait for him. He started post haste for the compound of the China United Church. Arriving there he found his host thumbing a pile of newly arrived papers. Like most missionaries the Rev. Scroggs augmented his slender income by acting as correspondent for a Shanghai paper. He frowned when Parker entered. A look of pain passed over his gaunt face at sight of the rent, blood stained suit.

An admonition that Parker was too old to begin alcoholic carousing hung unuttered on his lips. With the first ship arriving in a year he could look forward to the two Americans vacating his house. For the first time in days, he smiled pleasantly, nodded toward an inner room and went on reading.

Parker found Scott similarly immersed in a pile of papers. The younger man's glance rested on the mound beneath Parker's eye.

"What happened . . ."

For answer Parker tossed over the roll of bills. Scott leaped from his chair.

"Kwoh gave you . . . he never told me . . ."

"We got a job." Parker could not restrain himself. "This is an advance . . . a two week guarantee. Listen . . ."

Briefly he sketched the details of what had transpired. "I got half a hunch there's something queer about it," he concluded thoughtfully. "This fellow comes here needing a diver and accidentally finds me. He says he hasn't been in Shanghai in ten years and yet I see the stamp on the cigarettes. He's paying me more than I ever got in my life and for the easiest job I ever tackled. It looks too good to be true—and yet, crazy things like this happen in China."

Scott said nothing. He was piecing the story together. Tang—Sian—scrolls with the family records. There was another coincidence, something he'd been reading. The more he went over it all the more his brows knit, his mind raced. Before he told Parker his suspicions he wanted to have another look at a book in the Rev. Scroggs' library. He'd get it later, after Parker had gone to bed; no use exciting him over a story that might be only a wild dream.

Parker had stopped pacing and was looking oddly at him. "What are you so quiet about?"

"Just thinking. Look at it from this angle, boss. You got the dough, there's nothing preventing us from skipping down-river on the steamer. But this Chinese trusts you. He *sounds* on the up and up to me. But," he added, carefully choosing his words, "I'd like to meet him. I sure would like to, boss, and soon!"

"No reason you can't. Come around there with me sometime tomorrow. With your knowledge of Chinese history you two ought to have a lot to talk about."

"Yes," Scott said evenly. "I think we will have a lot to talk about." He lighted a cigarette, smiled grimly to himself and was glad Parker failed to notice his misgivings.

"This business about Abata . . ." Parker's voice was a welcome interruption, "and the three loafers trying to knock me off . . ."

"Has it got you scared?"

"Not scared but curious. It never happened before."

"I DIDN'T tell you they brought a lot of cases off the steamer after you'd left, big cases, looked like diving gear."

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"Gear, eh?" Parker got up and paced the room. "Why does Abata come to this God-forsaken place?"

"Boss," Scott drew on his cigarette, "I got a hunch, a hunch, mind you, that we're on the edge of something big. It may be that one chance in a million we've been combing the China Coast for."

"Let's hope so. Hmmm." Parker wheeled suddenly. "Where's my stuff?"

"I hadn't the money to bring it here so I took it to Kwoh. He paid the ricksha boys . . ."

"You think it's . . .?"

"Sure, it's safe there. Kwoh locked it up and gave me the key," Scott said.

"Well," Parker braced his shoulders. "Looks like we're in the chips for the time being, at least. We ought to make enough to get us out on the next ship."

"Maybe we won't want to get out . . ."

"What do you mean?"

Scott rustled among the papers on the floor. "Here's something . . ."

He was interrupted by a noise in the compound. Simultaneously came the Rev. Scroggs' voice. "Who can this be so late at night?"

Parker went into the vestibule. Scott followed. The house was deathly quiet as the coolie lifted the heavy iron bar and opened the door. There was a slight cough, a hissing intake of breath and a voice that might have been a child's.

"The foreigners, gentlemen, the divers mans . . ."

The coolie stepped back, glanced over his shoulder and motioned. Parker found a squat, swarthy skinned Japanese in foreign dress. A white uniform cap stood grotesquely straight on his bullet head.

He sucked his breath again, shook hands with himself and bowed three times. "Honorable mans, I are captain of ship arrived today from Hankow."

The Rev. Scroggs interrupted. "Bring him in," he said, with a warmth that was not lost on his two guests.

Parker bowed and opened the door wider.

The Japanese entered and followed him to the rear room, pausing to bow to the Rev. Scroggs, the coolie, to Scott and again to Parker. It was typical Japanese courtesy, typically overdone.

"He's the captain of the ship," Scott said. "I talked with him . . ."

Parker indicated a seat. "Sit down."

The Japanese bowed, wiped the back of his trousers with his cap and sat gingerly on the edge of the chair. "I am come on mission of mercy."

"Yes," Parker said. "Let's hear it."

The Japanese turned to Scott, smiling. "Today you are wanted trip to Hankow."

"So what?" Scott bent forward.

"So I am come to offer you poor hospitality of my poor ship."

"Why, that's—" Parker began.

"We haven't any money," Scott cut in.

THE Japanese frowned. It was plain that he was grievously hurt.

"I no ask for money," he sighed. "I want improve my English. I ver' glad take you gentlemens tomorrow daybreak, it would gave me some greatest joy . . ."

Scott caught his breath. He knew now more was behind the magnanimous offer than was apparent on the surface.

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"We couldn't go," he said.

Parker held his tongue. Scott seemed to have something on his mind. He'd let him handle this. The youngster had a good head.

The Japanese was pained. "I onnerstan'. You cannot assept my poor hospitality. You are afraid of lose 'face' because you have no money . . ."

"No, that isn't it," Scott interrupted. A blank look came over his features for a moment. "No, it's something else." He frowned, found it convenient to cough. Suddenly his face lit up. "You see, I got the asthma, got it bad," he coughed again, appeared to be on the verge of strangulation. "This is asthma time in Shanghai; no, we couldn't go . . ."

"Ah," the Japanese drew in his breath. He smiled, hung his head remorsefully. "I have ver' good friend in Shanghai; he is Japanese doctor, gentlemans, he will trit you for nothing . . ." The Jap's face wreathed in a wide smile. His eyes shone with deep kindliness. "I envy you ability for speaking English. I pay you to teacher me on trip . . ."

Scott got up, paced the room. "Sorry," he said. "We don't go back; my health . . ."

The Japanese frowned. His eyes narrowed. Of a sudden his voice was low, guttural.

"I sink," he said, casting a glance at Parker—"I sink it more better you go back." They waited, but he did not go on. He shrugged, picked up his hat and moved toward the door. "I repeats it," his voice verged on a hiss, "you will regrets it if you stay here."

"Life is full of regrets," Scott put in.

The Japanese went into the hall. The coolie let him out. Parker returned to the room and found Scott on his knees among the litter of newspapers. Suddenly he snatched at one, marked it with a pencil and held it up. Parker's eyes sped over the type:

SECRET EXPEDITION

It has been learned that a secret expedition in charge of I. Abata, one-time diver for the Japanese admiralty and later engaged in private practice here, is leaving tomorrow for the upper river.

The nature of the expedition's quest could not be ascertained, but it is believed to be connected with certain old records found by the Japanese during the looting of the Chinese Archives Building during the "Shanghai Incident."

Another report has it that the records recently have been restolen by unnamed Chinese, hence the secrecy and speed surrounding the present expedition. The unprecedented low water in the upper Yangtze—

"Boss," Scott interrupted, "this 'old family tree' story looks better and better. I think we're in for some big dough, if we handle it right . . ."

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT FROM ABATA.

THE following morning Scott was rolling over for his last bit of shut-eye when a commotion in the compound yard shot him bolt upright. He sprang off the couch and listened at the window. A voice was arguing with the house coolie.

He turned around and saw Parker scrambling erect. A moment later the coolie came into the room followed by a dazed, stammering native.

"That's the boy who helps around Kwoh's . . ." Scott began.

The coolie nodded, jabbered, waved his arms. "Tea shop wantchee you chop chop," he translated.

Parker was already pulling on his

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trousers. They dressed without waiting to hear the rest. Something had happened to the diving suit.

Scott ran out of the house drawing on his shirt. Parker was ahead of him, his shoes unlaced. He tripped over them once and Scott paused while he tied the knots. His mind was on the tea shop, but it was also on something else.

"Boss," he said, "a sampan can come up from Hankow in a week. That would make it possible for him to buy the cigarettes in Shanghai, fly to Hankow and reach here yesterday. No one watches the small craft on the river. And what did you start to tell me last night about law on buried treasure . . .?"

"If it's lost over ten years it belongs to the finder. What's the treasure angle? You hadn't mentioned it before."

Scott regretted having spoken so hastily. He didn't want to excite Parker without having a firm basis. He'd found the books in Scroggs' library the night before and his story was shaping. If his hunch was right . . .!

"It's just an idea," he gritted. "I want to see this Tang before I say any more." He put a hand inside his coat and felt of the holstered pistol under his left armpit.

Parker caught the motion, stopped short in the road.

"Did you bring that thing?"

"Sure, never can tell, boss."

Parker frowned, shook his head, went on. After a moment he said: "Fortune or no fortune, we need the money. It's take the job or starve. But come on, Kwoh . . ."

"We'll take it," Scott spoke up, "and something makes me think we won't starve, not for a long, long time. Here's Golden Phoenix Alley. There's a mob in front of the tea shop. It looks . . .!"

Before he could finish, Parker was running after him.

A crowd of curious thronged the doorway. The two foreigners pushed their way through and found a group of soldiers and police milling around a body on the floor. It was Kwoh. He was dead. A gaping hole in his forehead told that he had been shot.

A pistol lay clutched in his right hand. Beside the body sat the shop coolie crying and wringing his hands. Kwoh was at right angles to a padlocked door in the wall.

Immediately on seeing the newcomers the coolie leaped up, whined the story, in halting pidgin English.

Scott had brought the gear the night before and asked Kwoh to lock it up. Kwoh had placed it in the closet in the wall, padlocked the door and given the key to Scott, who had then left.

Shortly afterward, a black-gowned, masked man entered and demanded access to the diving suit. Kwoh refused, reached for his pistol, and there was a heated altercation, the stranger threatening and Kwoh warning him away. The din had aroused the coolie who had been sleeping in the rear room. He had come out, halted in the doorway, caught the gist of what the row was about.

As he stepped over the threshold Kwoh's eyes were averted, the stranger whipped out a pistol and fired. Kwoh slumped but emptied his gun at the retreating figure. That his aim had not been bad was attested by the wide smear of blood on the floor near the street entrance. The coolie pointed it out and rubbed his elbw.

"Kwoh hit him in the arm," Scott said.

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Parker nodded, went on. "And the man who murdered him?"

THE coolie hadn't seen his face. He had been short, and he talked with a Japanese accent.

"There's proof, boss. You know who it is now. This is the third attempt he's made to keep you from going up-river."

"But I'm going," Parker's teeth gritted. "I'm going even if I don't get paid. Abata thinks I'm through, does he, I'll . . . You got the key?"

"Sure."

"Good, nobody would try anything with this place full of people. Come on, we're going to see Tang. The sooner we start, the better I'll like it."

He was out of the tea house on the run, Scott on his heels.

"What about the police, boss?"

"They couldn't help. The coolie couldn't prove anything anyhow. And if he could Abata would have a Jap gunboat here from Hankow overnight." His voice firmed. "I'll handle this in my own way. Come on."

When they found the Chinese ten minutes later he had shed his silk long-gown. He was wearing a workman-like blue denim jacket and trousers as he superintended the packing of his bags. The coolie gave the foreigners a hard look and went on with his work, though less avidly, with an ear bent to catch the conversation.

After the introductions had been made, Tang said: "I'm anxious to get started. I've taken it upon myself to hire a large junk and a crew—one that can be trusted," he added with a smile. "Everything is at the landing steps waiting. I'd like to . . ."

"We've got to have a little talk first," Scott said.

A note of hesitancy left Tang's mouth half open. His jaw firmed, his eyes glinted. The scar on his neck became livid. "I have already talked with Mr. Parker, he is the one I discuss business with."

"But Scott's my partner," Parker put in.

"Ah, yes," Tang's back was turned. But when he faced the Americans his stained teeth were showing, though his face wore a friendly smile. "What is on your mind, young man?"

Scott grinned at the allusion to his youth. Young though he might be, he felt himself a match for the Chinese in a battle of wits. He had something up his sleeve and the way to prove his hunch was to catch Tang by surprise.

"Are you sure you only want these family scrolls?" he asked.

"But of course, my friend, of course. Why else should I . . ."

"There's treasure around the Pao Tzu." Scott hurled it at him. "Jades . . ."

The Chinese lay back in his chair and laughed long and with conviction. When he had finished, he brought a flush to Scott's cheeks. "Of course there is, the Tang treasure. You've been reading some old books. I know all those stories about the white jades that were stolen from my ancestor's graves. My dear young man, these stories crop up every so often in China. I'm not surprised you're taken in by this one, but we Chinese . . ."

"And you're not after it?" Scott was abashed by Tang's easy admittance of the fabulous Tang treasure.

"I'm after whatever I can find. My primary interest is in the scrolls. Of course, if your employer, Mr. Parker," he paused to clear his throat, "finds anything else, though you understand I'm not going to pay him to continue a wild goose chase, I'll naturally be per-

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fectly willing to give him what you Americans call a 'cut.' I think fifteen per cent would be about right. Is that sufficient for you, Mr. Scott?"

Scott was flabbergasted. If Tang were playing a part, it was the most consummate bit of acting he had ever seen. He bit his lip, watched Tang and noticed that the Chinese's gimlet eyes were never off his face. There had been a slight muscular contraction in his fists, a foot moved in as though he were readying himself to spring erect. But his mouth retained the genial smile.

"Yes," Scott found himself saying mechanically. "That's plenty fair. Yes, that's all right."

TANG nodded to Parker. Suddenly Scott was aware the coolie had halted midway in the door to the rear room. He was looking back with tautly drawn features, his piglike eyes shifting unceasingly from one American to the other. When he caught Scott's scrutiny his eyes seemed to narrow; catlike he disappeared.

"And is this—what you Americans call a 'hold-up'—agreeable to you, Mr. Parker?" Tang rubbed it in. "I thought we'd settled everything between us yesterday."

"Yes," Parker said, "all right with me. I don't know much about these things but young Scott here never has his eyes out of a book . . ." He wanted to say that young Scott had bitten off more than he could chew, that Tang had been more than prepared for him, but thought the better of it. He knew from Scott's voice that he was not yet convinced Tang was laying all his cards on the table.

The Chinese arose, held out his hand, foreign fashion. Parker grasped it and was aware of steeled muscles. Tang's hand was not extended to Scott, he noticed. He neared the door and turned.

"Last night the tea shop proprietor who told you about me was . . ."

"I know," Tang anticipated him. He frowned as though hearing of the death of a close friend. "My coolie was out last night and brought me the news. The murderer was not identified." Suddenly he caught himself, put a hand on Parker's sleeve. "I know what you mean, the rival expedition which came yesterday. News travels fast in China. Perhaps they want to get my scrolls and make me pay a stiff price for them. That would be another, what you call a 'hold-up.' Wouldn't it, Mr. Scott?" He smiled, but his voice was hollow. Scott shifted uneasily and did not reply.

Tang spoke over his shoulder in dialect. The coolie appeared with a newspaper. The two Americans riveted their eyes on it. It was the same edition Scott had shown Parker the night before. Tang read the piece in a flat voice. Neither American commented.

"I have not overlooked this possibility," came from the bland mouth. "You know, Mr. Parker, we Chinese may have moments when we dislike foreigners. But they are only phases and soon pass. But perhaps you have discovered our deep-seated and justifiable hatred for Japanese, hatred is the correct word. And after the sad affair at Shanghai we loathe them more than ever before, regardless of what the government at Nanking does. Never forget that a Chinese sees in a Japanese his mortal enemy. But I am digressing. Oh, yes . . ."

He went to a bag, pausing as his hands were on the straps.

"Do either of you happen to have a pistol?"

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Parker was about to answer when Scott cut him off. "No, we haven't."

Tang opened the bag and brought out a heavy Lüger. He passed it to Parker. "Perhaps it would be better if you carried this. One never knows . . ."

Parker put the pistol in his belt. "Thanks."

"And now," Tang said, "I'd like to get underway at once. I am anxious to return to Sian."

"In a half-hour," Parker said, "I've only to collect my gear."

"Good, I have the junk and crew at the jetty. In addition I have also a collection of anchors, ropes, everything I thought you'd need. And your partner, Mr. Scott . . .?" He looked at the younger man and smiled.

"I'm ready now," Scott said.

"Excellent." He opened the door.

SCOTT looked closely at his hands and arms, at the coolie who stood uncertainly in the room watching them through shoe button eyes. Neither had a bandage or wound.

"At the landing steps immediately," Parker was saying.

Scott followed him into the hall. The door closed without a sound. When they were in the alley, Parker turned.

"What's this treasure talk?"

"I'll tell you later," Scott said, "I guess I made a fool of myself, throwing it at him like that." He looked up closely into Parker's face searching for an answer. He wondered if Parker had been too absorbed in the conversation to notice several things that struck him as suspiciously odd.

"He sure beat you to the punch every time," Parker said. "You didn't fool him much. What do you think now?"

Scott covered a half-block before answering. When he did he chose his words with care.

"I think he's just a little too smooth, boss. He was ready for me, yes, but too ready. Instead of convincing me this is going to be a picnic for grandpa's scrolls, he made me doubtful."

Parker laughed, slapped the pistol. "What was the idea of telling him . . .?"

"Now we got two, one for each of us. And I'm carrying mine—all the time. Let's get the gear."

The crowd at the tea shop had dwindled. The nearer relatives had already left for the joss house where they would burn incense, buy millions of dollars in paper money and get cardboard boats to help Kwoh over the sea to immortality. The body had been removed. The coolie was in charge, crying, wringing his hands and smoking an occasional pink pill.

Scott gave him a dollar, unlocked the closet door. Parker summoned half a dozen ricksha boys. The diving equipment was put aboard with much shouting and the entourage started for the landing steps.

Arriving there the two Americans found Tang already ensconced under a mat awning in the stern. The junk was large, fully fifty feet, manned by twenty typical Chinese sailors, dull eyed, slow, but broad shouldered and capable. The *laoban,* or captain, appeared the brightest of the lot.

Tang hadn't overlooked a thing. His coolie lifted some deck planking and revealed a mixed assortment of anchors, ropes, wire cables, even a makeshift sort of first aid kit. When he pointed to a small sampan on the bow, he grinned.

Tang was anxious to get started. While Parker saw to the stowing of

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his gear under the forward deck Scott looked around.

Suddenly he caught something that brought the blood pounding into his neck.

The Chinese's bags were in a corner under the mat awning and on one of them he saw a peculiar chalk mark, a circle and cross. It was the mark used by the baggage coolies at the Shanghai flying field. The chalk was fresh, little of it rubbed off. He knew without being told that those bags had been flown from Shanghai to Hankow—recently. He went forward and said nothing, but he felt that gradually, piece by piece, Tang's story was commencing to fall apart. He had been so slick that he'd overlooked something.

STANDING in the bow Scott's avid eyes scanned the river surface. The steamer had already departed and the anchorage was deserted. But at a small dock farther down-river a junk, similar to Tang's, was piled high with packing cases. Scott needed no second look to know they were the ones he had seen come ashore the previous afternoon.

He was peering intently at them when a small sampan pushed away and was hastily sculled up-river. In the stern sat the same immobile, wizened figure that had come ashore ahead of the cases. Scott watched. The sampan drew nearer, came directly toward the jetty.

"He's sure got nerve, that Jap," he said half-aloud. Then he called over his shoulder: "We're going to have a visitor."

Parker clambered to the cement steps and looked out. Tang sprang up behind him. His bronzed face paled at the sight. No one spoke.

The sampan came in, but Abata remained motionless in the stern. His pockmarked, flaccid face was a study in laconic reserve. Maggot eyes leered from under converging brows. He took off his sun helmet and wiped his closely cropped pate. Brown hands remained in the sleeves of his long-gown.

"What do you want?" Tang broke the stillness.

The thin, cruel mouth parted in a wry smile. "I am come to see my frain's Mister Parkers and Mister Scotts."

"Well," Parker snapped, "you see us. Now what?"

The flatulent face found difficulty in forcing a semblance of friendliness. "I am come here on work, maybes we are on same job."

"And what if we are?"

"My frain', you do not onnerstan'. Before time was a accident. I am your frain'. Perhaps . . ." There was an ingratiating smile.

"It was no accident when you cut my hose."

"But true, accident. I have explain to the board . . ."

"Yeh, and they blackballed you," Scott put in.

The Jap went on unheeding. He shifted his attack. "I am comes to tell Americans you work for thief, what you call 'crook.' This man have stole . . ."

"You get out of here," Tang interrupted, continuing with a burst of diatribes in Chinese. He turned, grunted an order over his shoulder.

Abata's smile froze. "Does he not convince by this protests? I am advice my foreign frains to drop thees job. It are . . ."

"Whatever he may be, I *know* what you are," Parker growled. "We've met before . . ."

The smile vanished, a furtive,

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ominous sneer crept into the guttural voice. "And we meet some more. I am advice . . ."

Tang's coolie stepped to the jetty, listened a moment and at a nod from Tang shoved the sampan out into the stream. The *lodah* was for bringing it in again when Abata hissed an order between gritted teeth.

"For you, Tang, what you call yourself, I will not forgets these insult. This Americans have it right, we meets again and no foreign pigs are near to interfere. This time Mistair Parkers . . ." Suddenly he caught himself, smiled grimly and flicked his wrist. The *lodah* leaned on his scull and the sampan swept down-river.

"Well," Scott watched the retreating figure, "he laid his cards on the table. Looks to me like he doesn't like us, boss . . ."

Parker was not listening. Tang was whispering in his ear. Scott saw the black head shaking in protest, heard the hissing intake of breath. The Chinese's hand fell on Parker's elbow, led him away from the junk. Scott stepped aboard but found an excuse to glance back. As he did, the yellow hand was pushing a roll of bills in Parker's pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

A MURDERER BETRAYS HIMSELF.

TWO hours later the junk wallowed in the reverse current running up-river and Ichang was a brown smudge behind the enclosing walls of Lampshine Gorge. Somber limestone cliffs towering overhead turned day into night.

A member of the crew sat in the bow whistling for wind, in the traditional manner, the sound echoing through the dim canyons. The *lolo* sprang about the deck with a large foreign style mop in his hands, urging the polers. At intervals he would dip it in the coffee colored, swirling race and dash it over sweating backs. The *laoban*, or captain, was everywhere at once, shouting, screaming, whining, urging the men on. He had been promised a bonus for a quick trip to the anchorage and he intended to earn it. Further, his son was aboard and he wanted to gain much "face."

Tang squatted on his haunches in the stern, smoking innumerable cigarettes. His coolie, expressionless, craftily furtive, crouched behind him, his eyes alternately on the two Americans. Parker and Scott huddled under the mat awning for two reasons, one of which was to escape the noonday heat.

"The graves in Sian were looted by retreating soldiers when the monarchy went out," Scott was whispering. "The Tang white jades were famous . . ."

"White!" Parker's face flushed. "He asked me if I knew anything of white jade, said it was more valuable than green."

Scott pursed his lips. "Seems to me he's told us about everything he should have kept secret, if he was working anything. But that may be Oriental psychology."

"Maybe he's fooling us with the truth," Parker laughed. "But go on."

"I've been reading the memoirs of one of the missionaries up here and he says the soldiers came across country heading for the Yangtze. They reached Kweichow above the Pao Tzu but there the trail ends. They seem to have broken up, most of them went back to their farms. But there were some who were too smart for that.

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They had the jades and they had an idea of their value.

"Now my hunch is that this group headed down-river for Shanghai. That was the only place where they could find a buyer who would pay anything near the real worth of the jades. I got an idea these men started in a ship or a junk and were wrecked, because the stuff has never appeared for sale in Shanghai, or in Europe. I found another book in Scroggs' library which gave a list of valuables buried in the coffins and the white jades were estimated to be worth over a million. They are fabulous.

"Now, going back to the trip down-river, as I see it the boat was wrecked. Where? The most likely place is the Pao Tzu, the worst rapid between Kweichow and Ichang. The other bad ones, the Hsin T'an, the Yeh T'an, the Buffalo Mouth and the Kung Ling are all above Kweichow. By the process of elimination, boss, I think Tang knows more than he's telling us. He doesn't want any family scrolls, he wants the jades. We're on the edge of something big, or I miss my guess."

"Then why should he offer us the cut without a protest?"

"Just as you say, because he's fooling us with the truth. He's not dumb. He knows we suspect something. So he throws us off guard by agreeing to whatever we ask. But when it comes to *paying* . . . he's a pretty sly Chinese to me, boss. He's playing a waiting game. Trust a Chinese to be cunning. Tang's been in Shanghai recently—I know . . ."

"But what about the Japs? How are they in on it?" Parker was unconvinced.

"Just as the newspaper article said. There were some records in the Archives Building in Shanghai. When the Japs took over they found them. They could send an outfit up any time but suddenly a Chinese throws a wrench in it by stealing the dope. Then the Japs have to work fast. So—!"

"Sounds like pretty clear thinking, son." Parker scratched his chin, turned away and smiled. He had Scott, had him dead to rights. It was a bad thing for young people to be too suspicions, was apt to give them a warped perspective on life.

"When did you say those graves were looted?"

"When the monarchy went out."

"And what year was that?"

"Nineteen eleven. It may have been twelve when the retreating soldiers reached the river."

"Hmmm. Son, I hate to bust all your ideas, but Tang told me the scrolls were in the wreck of the Fatshan. She went down about twelve years ago. That knocks your story into a cocked hat."

"The Fatshan." Scott's face froze. He hesitated, fastened his eyes on the river. But if he were in error, he'd admit it. "Boss, if he told you that I guess I *am* wrong. But still, this guy Tang . . ."

PARKER let him down easily. "Well, never mind, kid. The important thing now is that we got money. He gave me a week's pay this morning when Abata left."

"Got it with you?"

"I couldn't leave it in Ichang."

The junk was bucking an eddy and threw him off balance. In attempting to regain his feet his eyes shot sideways. Tang's towering coolie was haunched close behind him, so close he could not have helped overhearing the whispered conversation. He stood up, his face blank, and held out a hand:

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"Sla ho . . .?"

"He wants a match," Parker said, jumping up and extending a package. The coolie took it and moved back toward his employer, his gimlet eyes lingering on Scott.

Scott's mind was a jumble of confusion. He'd caught a suggestion in Tang's hotel room that the coolie understood English far better than he let his empty, unintelligent face indicate. That feeling now became a certainty.

He looked aft. Tang was gazing serenely at a group of natives fishing with cormorants. The coolie had given him the matches and gone forward with the crew. Tang was smiling indolently, lolling back in a rude chair, pausing now and then to peck at a nostril. But as Scott watched he noticed that frequently the shoe-button eyes shifted down-river as though they might be expecting an interruption in the idyll.

The *laoban* estimated that with the favorable reverse current they had covered half the distance when he headed for shore that night. Tang was for pushing on but the crew grumbled. He went forward and argued with them, harangued, but they were adamantine. They took his cursing but would not move. It had been a hard day. The coming day would be harder.

The junk found seclusion against the bank in a cove at one side of the stream. The evening meal consisted of goat stew, cabbage, dried beans and rice. The *taipans* ate together under the aft mat awning, the crew forward, Tang's coolie with them.

The meal was finished in a lowering mist. An eerie, gray loom hung between the enclosing walls. Scott took the pistol Tang had given him and left the junk to stretch his legs, after learning Parker was staying aboard. He walked across the stony foreshore and climbed to the trackers' path high up on the bank. Behind him the river lay shrouded in an impenetrable dimness, the single light on the junk's bow failing to cut the murk for more than a score of feet. But on the higher ground he was in the glare of a setting sun while the sky was cloudless.

He walked some distance along the deserted path and came to a native village where at a stall on the roadside he bought a couple of small oranges for two coppers each. As the peelings fell to the ground the stall owner snatched them up, put them in a pile on the counter and refunded two coppers. Scott laughed, he had seen it before. They would be sold to Chinese on the river for their supposed medicinal qualities.

He started back. He had reached the mark in the path opposite the junk mooring when a sound came from the river. Abruptly he stopped. It was the chugging of an engine. A week before he would have welcomed it as indicative that ships were running again, but now it froze the blood in his veins.

AFTER listening he knew the ship was creeping up-river. Finally the faint droning ceased, he heard the clanging of chains through a hawsepipe. He tore down the path at breakneck speed.

Nearing the water's edge he proceeded more cautiously. His eyes found the junk, and were glued upon it. The light on the bow had been doused. He crept forward behind boulders and saw Tang and the coolie crouching under the awning. He paused, stared and inched on. Tang's back was to him. The Chinese was peering at the anchored ship.

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Something long and black lay across his knees, its snout pointing to mid-river. Scott knew it on the instant. It was a Thompson machine gun.

He crept forward for a closer scrutiny when a rock clattered beneath him. It splashed in the water and simultaneously there was a blurred movement in the junk's stern. Scott sprang aboard.

When he reached the Chinese's side Tang was casually puffing a cigarette. His hands were empty. The coolie squatted on his haunches and picked at his teeth, his face wearing the inscrutable blankness.

"Well," Tang smiled, "you're back early. Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"Had a fine walk." Scott's eyes ranged the brief cabin but he could find no gun, nor any suggestion of one. "I thought I heard a ship . . .?"

"You did. We've just been listening, trying to place it. It's anchored out there." The stained teeth appeared in a friendly grin. "I didn't want to give away our location so I had the coolie put out the light."

"Got any idea what ship it is?"

"No. But it isn't the one the Jap came up from Hankow in. You know, I rather suspect our Japanese friend, those turtle spawn are capable . . ."

Scott was forced to laugh outright. Again Tang had beaten him to the surrise he'd hoped to spring. But this time Tang had left something out. He hadn't mentioned the gun. Despite its absence Scott knew he had seen it.

Where could the Chinese have hidden it? There was only one place, under a plank in the deck. That knowledge burned on Scott's memory like a hot flame. He had something else on Tang now, in addition to the mark on his bag. It was like drawing a third ace to a pair.

He yawned, nodded to the two Chinese and went forward. Finding a piece of clean *pukai* he wrapped it around him and lay down beside Parker. The older man was asleep, his face set in a warm smile. Scott felt something like a guardian and the feeling stimulated him. As his eyes closed a similar smile lifted the corners of his mouth.

The mystery boat had disappeared when he awoke in the morning. No one had seen it.

IT was noon, two days later, when the junk rounded a bend and came on a body of swirling water at whose head, several li in the distance, a white churning foam splayed against green banks.

"Pao Tzu," the *laoban* grinned and pointed.

Parker, under Tang's urging, was already breaking out his equipment.

Scott busied himself helping the *tolo* unwind and run ashore the long plaited bamboo line with which the crew would haul them above the rock, as there was no reverse current. The crew waded ashore and picked up the small lines branching off the main one. The *tolo* followed. The *laoban,* with his son, headed a trio at the stern sweep.

At a signal the haulers began a slow, rhythmic chant. Backs bent, shoulders almost touching the ground, groaning, straining for toeholds, the line tightened and the junk crept forward.

They skirted the starboard bank. After a couple of hours Scott made out the ominously black, flat topped rock that was the dreaded Pao Tzu. With the river low it was no menace, but he could see that a two-foot rise would barely cover it in a swirling eddy, one of six feet submerge it in a ripple subtly treacherous yet innocent.

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They grounded half a mile above. The most dangerous part of the trip was coming. The haulers stowed their lines aboard. The *laoban* and *tolo* balanced heavy anchors on each side of the bow, coiled lengths of cable on the deck and made the ends fast to the capstan.

After a shot of *samshui* and a prayer to the river god they pushed out, sculled desperately to mid-stream; catching the vortex they relaxed, held their breaths, waited. A half dozen of the strongest men went to the single sweep in the stern. The junk swept down, came in so close to the rock that one man fell on his knees whimpering, others prayed.

Suddenly, at a signal from the *laoban,* the crew bent to the sculls, the anchors were kicked over and she came around with a dizzying jerk, the foaming swirl drenching everyone aboard. They were there.

Tang shouted with pleasure. He swarmed over the deck, calculating, estimating by markers on shore. He talked with the *laoban.* The anchor lines were payed out and they dropped back a score of feet. After another consultation and more measuring and he was satisfied. He came aft to the two Americans.

"Now, before you go down," he smiled most ingratiatingly at Parker, "there is a little something . . ." He hesitated. "Where did I tell you the scrolls were?"

Scott sprang forward and listened. Parker's eyes narrowed, surveyed Tang's bland yellow face. "In the Fatshan."

"Ah, yes. I have just remembered . . . 'er," he coughed delicately, hesitated, but the assurance remained, "it seems, that is, I have just remembered, in the excitement of talking with you, I may have said the Fatshan was our goal, but she isn't. I merely wanted to know if you knew where she was," he laughed politely. "No, the scrolls are in a junk, close to the Fatshan, and if you look around down there you will see one, that is, I hope," he turned, beamed at Scott, "we all hope you will find one, don't we?"

Parker's blood pounded. He saw a smile break over Scott's bronzed face. The older man laughed, the thing was beginning to get funny. Scott looked at him and winked, smiled. Then both laughed together. Tang thought they were laughing with him. He guffawed loudly. The coolie caught the infection and roared. But the Americans were aware the Chinese laughed only with their mouths, their eyes remained gimlet sharp.

THEY were interrupted abruptly when the screech of a whistle sounded above the swirling river. They looked aft.

A black hulled ship was nosing out of a backwash on the far bank. She was blunt nosed, short, squat and capable. She crept up on their stern, her wheelhouse shuttered behind steel sheeting.

"That's the old Hakodate Maru, a river gunboat they'd retired and had tied up in Hankow," Parker said. "I got it," he rushed on, "they were nervous about us, so they sent her up. Abata transferred from his junk to her in Ichang and . . ."

"Looks like he's got a pretty good backer," Scott put in. "They mean business."

Tang stared aft, transfixed.

As she drew in closer they saw Abata in her bow, one hand upraised signalling the house. No one else was visible on her decks. Save for his

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presence she might have been a deserted ship. But they knew instinctively that avid eyes were watching from the rifle peeps in the bullet proof shields around the bridge.

Abata's hand was aloft, the fingers were opening and closing when suddenly the sleeve of his long-gown fell down and revealed a wide bandage around his elbow. Quickly he frowned, dropped his arm and his eyes ranged the junk.

"There's the proof," Scott nudged Parker. "He murdered Kwoh. . . ."

"The Jap pigs are murderers," Tang hissed, his fists clenching.

The anchor chain crashed through the pipes and the interloper eased back, lay not fifty feet behind.

Abata's pockmarked face grinned down on them: "Hello, Mistair Parkers, my frain' . . .!"

CHAPTER V.

DOUBLE CROSS.

PARKER'S brass bound pump chest was firmly wedged in the stern, coils of hose lay on the deck. Other paraphernalia was scattered about. Scott dropped in the heavy Jacob's ladder and felt it strike bottom.

"About twenty-five feet, boss," he said.

Tang came up, bent over Parker. "Remember, look for a junk. She should be well preserved in this icy water. In her you will find the scrolls . . ." He patted Parker's shoulder, went back to the crew.

Parker nodded, got up, snapped on the weights and looked at the heavy shoes. He smiled grimly at the encased knife Scott had left around his middle.

"No sharks here, son."

"No sharks, boss, but maybe something as bad. I'll say it takes guts . . ."

"Nonsense," Parker cut him off. "Why shouldn't I? If Abata starts anything I'll beat him the way I did before—only this time I'll kill him."

"If I don't do it first," Scott's eyes glinted, peered aft, at the lifeless ship. He leaned forward, close to Parker's ear, "Boss, I didn't tell you, Tang's got a machine gun aboard."

Parker grimaced: "Know where it is?"

Scott nodded, looked aft. Tang was watching them.

"All set, son," Parker said in a loud voice.

Scott lifted the heavy helmet, settled it around the neckpiece and spun the thumbscrews. Parker shrugged, settled himself into the suit, nodded through the heavy glass that he was ready and climbed waist deep on the ladder for the pump test.

Scott spun the handles. Parker nodded, waved his hand. The air was coming through without clogging. Scott dropped the weighted guide line. Parker grasped it, let it run through one hand, and climbed down.

The bottom was rocky, devoid of marine growth. Parker smiled. He stepped off the ladder onto the riverbed and realized that at that brief depth he might as well have been working in the open air. There would be no decompression worries. After the depths he had been accustomed to in the Whangpoo this would be a cinch.

By tapping on the guide line he signalled Scott he had landed safely. He clutched the line hard and waited. Answering taps came back. Trust the kid to be on the job.

Parker turned toward the starboard bank. A dull bronze shape lay there and he wanted to investigate it. The

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current was strong and treacherous but with caution he would be safe. The water was reasonably clear, tinted an opaque, silt yellow. It was almost like getting back to his salt water days off San Francisco after the mud filled depths of the lower Yangtze.

He saw on getting closer that the dim shape was the Fatshan. Her bottom had been ripped open as though by a can opener. She had commenced to fill and in being swept along by the current had jackknifed around a large rock.

He made mental note of her, then went back to the guide line and crossed over to the port bank. The fifteen minutes he spent there were fruitless.

RETURNING, he started down with the current. After a score of steps a somber, grayish heap loomed ahead. He went on and found it to be a heavy Chungking junk. She sat bow up-river and a gaping hole told that after striking she had been turned completely around and now lay cradled between two massive boulders.

More breathtaking, beside her was resting the anchor of the Hakodate Maru. Ten feet to the port and it would have crashed through the water-logged planks, sent them swirling down and ruined any possibility of salvage. But now the junk was intact. Beyond a hole in the bow she was unhurt. The sight was so grotesque he stood staring.

Ironically, it was the anchor chain that enabled him to half climb, half pull himself to her deck. It was darker there, the shadow of the Hakodate Maru looming ghost-like, cminously foreboding overhead.

He moved along the sloping deck, braced himself and reached for the hatch cover. It came up, disintegrated and was swept away. Beneath him lay a tangled snarl of débris—rifles, swords, spears, saddles long since bereft of leather. Opposite were tables, chairs, a native cook stove, beds, a coffin, other oddments he could not recognize. It was the typical plunder of a Chinese army.

He went aft and saw a crude poop. Four doors gave entry on the starboard side. The first came free at his touch, floated past and disappeared ghoulishly in the yellow water. He went in and, beyond an empty bunk, found nothing. He came from the second cabin with less success. He spent an hour in the four and came away empty handed. Meanwhile he wanted a breath of air, and to settle a doubt that had plagued him. Why had Abata not appeared?

He found his way out, lowered himself by the anchor chain and retraced his steps to the Jacob's ladder. Striking the guide line an instantaneous answer came back from above. Good old Scott. His alertness was a virtue. Parker signalled that he was coming up and commenced to climb.

When he was shoulders out of the water Scott bent over the low gunwale of the junk and removed the helmet. Parker filled his lungs, continued on up to the deck, past the overhang. Tang was kneeling beside him before he could get erect.

Has he found anything? Parker shook his head.

"Did you locate the junk?" Parker nodded, commenced giving the details.

The black eyes slitted, the yellow forehead creased in a frown. "The . . ." he hesitated, "the scrolls wouldn't be in the cargo hold . . ."

"There's a poop with eight cabins," Parker cut him off. "I only got to four of them so far. After lunch and

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a cigarette I'll go back and do the others."

The pallor went out of the Chinese's face. "Ah, yah. Good, good." He spat toward the ship astern. "The Japanese pig . . .?"

"Never saw him, wish I had. Then I'd have an idea . . ."

The thin lips pursed. "You are right. He is up to something."

"Did you notice Tang never asked if you found dear old grandfather's body?" Scott asked an hour later as he was adjusting the weights. "It's beginning to strike me, boss, as though he's lost some of that great reverence for his ancestors."

PARKER looked up, caught his breath. Tang was watching them from under the awning. Suddenly he got to his feet, came cat-like toward them. Scott caught the glint in Parker's eye and broke off suddenly. The Chinese knelt at the head of the ladder. His voice bore thinly veiled malice.

"Are you sure, Mr. Parker, you did not find those copper tubes . . .?"

"What's the idea?" Scott cut him off angrily. "Of course he didn't find them. If he had . . ."

"You are a servant," hissed from between the gritted teeth. "I am talking to your employer." He turned to the older man. "You are not wasting time down there, Mr. Parker, so your wages . . .?"

Parker flushed, straightened. "Tang, I'm as anxious as you are to get out of here. And as for wasting time, I've got a professional reputation second to none on the China Coast. Don't get any ideas— And go easy on Scott, here. He's no servant, understand that. About the wages, you guaranteed me . . ."

"Ah, my friend," the voice was suavely condescending, "perhaps I spoke hastily. But I was worried, not so much about you wasting time, as over the possibility of the tubes having been washed down the river. You don't think . . .?"

"I told you before there are four cabins I haven't been in," Parker said, gruffly.

"Ah, good. As for your wages, my dear Mr. Parker, they are guaranteed for the two weeks even though you find what I want this afternoon."

Parker made no reply. It was his first altercation with Tang and it upset him. It showed him that Tang was not the easy going, lavish spender his actions in the hotel had indicated, that he was greedy, suspicious. And those growing number of holes in his story—saying the scrolls were in the Fatshan then changing directions, the cigarettes and the Shanghai stamp. At the same time they built up Scott's theory of the graves having been robbed by retreating soldiers.

By and large, Scott seemed to know what he had been talking about, his thinking had been pretty clear. They were after the Tang jades, not scrolls as the kid had held from the first. For all of Tang's native guile and cunning, he hadn't fooled the brain behind young Scott's keen gray eyes. And that greed of Tang's—it would get him in trouble yet.

The reason for Abata's presence was that he knew about the jades from the records in Shanghai—Scott had put his finger on that, too. The best Jap diver on the China Coast wouldn't come a thousand miles up-river for somebody's family tree. But why wasn't he searching under water?

Landing, Parker went back to the junk, climbed aboard via the anchor

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chain and searched the port cabins. The first two were empty but in the third he found the skeleton of a native in what had been a long-gown. The man was face down on the bunk. He was a grisly, macabre horror, sickening.

A pistol had been clutched in his hand but it had fallen to the cabin floor. The extended arm wafted back and forth. The face, repulsive, lips missing, stained teeth grinning, was turned toward the door. Parker got out as quickly as he could push his hose before him. Only the coldness of the Yangtze had preserved any vestige of one-time reality, in the rotted body.

THE net result of the three other cabins duplicated the morning search—nothing. He'd have to go through the hold. That would come tomorrow. Meanwhile it was growing darker. He went back to the ladder.

Tang was on his knees as before, as his helmet broke the plunging current. When Parker reported failure the scar on the Chinese's neck throbbed red. His pig-like, squinting eyes glared suspiciously. As he was opening his mouth to speak, there was a commotion among the crew. He got up and went forward, the coolie hulking on behind.

The two Americans listened to a heated altercation. The *laoban* was whining, wringing his hands and pointing to the small sampan on the bow. Tang said something. The coolie stepped forward. The *laoban* shook his head, begged. Tang's reply was curt, bitter.

The *laoban's* son pushed through the closely packed group and stood by his father. He spoke. The coolie's ham-like fist shot out and sprawled him to the deck. There was a muttered grunt from Tang and the coolie's foot flashed, kicked the boy over the side. He disappeared, screaming, in a whirl of foam. Rescue was impossible, the current was too swift. The coolie laughed.

There was a pregnant silence. Then with a cry the *laoban* leaped. A pistol glinted in Tang's hand. The *laoban* hesitated, one of the crew pulled him back. He whimpered, cried.

Scott was on his feet in an instant. He sprang to the bow and elbowed the coolie aside. "Why doesn't he murder somebody his own size . . .? Why did you tell him to kick the boy over . . .?"

Tang protested heatedly though his mouth thinned. "I told him to let the boy up, not kick him. He misunderstood . . .!"

"Misunderstood, hell," Scott said. "What's it all about?" He edged closer to Tang, stood a head above him, his shoulder muscles rippling beneath his bronzed skin.

"These people want to go ashore in the sampan . . ."

"Why not let them go, they've been marooned out here . . ."

Tang glanced aft at the overhanging bow of the Hakodate Maru, then at Scott, pretended not to see the clutching fingers that thirsted for his neck. Scott hesitated, stepped back. No words were necessary.

"You may be right, we got to keep this crowd aboard—but if your coolie wants trouble let him pick somebody his own size, let him pick on me. And . . ."

"Come on back here," Parker called. "Mind your own business, kid."

"But the coolie just murdered the *laoban's* son, kicked him over the side . . ."

Parker made no reply. He beckoned. As Scott took a hitch in his belt,

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picked his way aft, Parker's mind ran: "I'd hate to be on the receiving end, if you lost your temper, youngster."

The crew went into a jabbering huddle that Tang's threats could not still. He looked at Scott's retreating figure, thought twice and lit a cigarette. He knew what they were talking about. They were praising the young American, agreeing that in the event of trouble they would find a defender in him.

Scott sat beside Parker. "That coolie's coming for me one of these days, I can see it in his eyes. Only when he comes, I won't be there. Boss, jades or no jades I'm going to pay him back . . ."

"Yes, your keep your shirt on. I saw what happened. We'd better play Tang's game, keep mum and wait." He spat into the river, his grayed head bent. He whispered: "You'll get the coolie—if I don't get him before you."

PARKER was sipping a bowl of tea beside Scott that night when Tang squatted between them. The coolie was on his haunches a foot away.

"The Jap pig?" Tang asked.

"Haven't seen a sign of him," Parker said.

"Ah, that's queer."

Tang looked aft, the others followed his motion. The Hakodate Maru swung against her anchor chain, a bone in her teeth from the racing current. Her bow loomed over them but from what they could see of her deck she might have been an empty shell. Only a thin wisp of steam at her stack proclaimed life aboard. She hulked squat, threatening, brooding, her house shields down, a funereal air about her, her chain clanking dismally in the half light.

"She's beginning to get me," Parker said.

"I wish something would happen," Scott put in. Tang lighted a cigarette, drew on it, his flashing eyes shifting from Scott's face to Parker's. Something was on his mind. Suddenly he bent forward. "Gentlemen, I have a very shrewd idea." They looked up. "Suppose we take the Jap into partnership . . ."

Scott shot bolt upright. "I thought you hated him."

"Are you suggesting . . ." Parker began.

"Hear me out, friends. With two divers searching we have a better chance than with one. Then when the tubes are found we . . ."

"Yes," Scott snapped. "'We what . . .'"

". . . take them from him . . ." Tang whispered casually.

"Piracy . . .?" Parker snorted.

"Not at all," Tang was smilingly composed. "I have reason to believe the turtle doesn't know where we are searching, he's waiting until we find something, then he'll go down. Therefore, he will be stealing from us.

"Oh, well," he shrugged suddenly, rubbed his nose, "it's just an idea. Forget it."

They were interrupted when the coolie snatched at Tang's arm, pointed aft. A sampan was putting off from the Hakodate Maru's stern. It swung back on the current and was sculled to the starboard bank. A lone, huddled figure crouched in the stern, his back to the junk.

"Hey! Boss!" Scott whispered.

Parker made no reply. He was busy thinking, his brow furrowed, his head half bent. Tang's suggestion of piracy and the killing of the *laoban's* son had opened new vistas, revealed that be-

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neath his veneer of culture he was a little better than a *ronin.* But there was a boomerang that would aid the two Americans in the event of trouble —the crew would be on their side.

"Suppose Abata boarded us," he said. "We don't know how big his crew is. Suppose they jumped down here . . ."

"You have a pistol between you," Tang put in. "And I have one."

"That all the arms we got?" Scott asked innocently.

Tang spread his hands in a gesture of dismay. "Unfortunately I neglected to bring more. I never suspected anything like this," he waved a thumb at the menace aft. He was lying and the Americans knew it.

"Well," Parker spoke up after a thoughtful pause, "we can't do anything tonight, let's talk it over in the morning."

TANG'S eyes bored into his. He wondered if the American had caught anything suspicious in his suggestion of including Abata in the salvage. "All right," he smiled after a moment of reassurance. "We'll talk it over again."

His eyes glinted, his brain raced, a crafty smile hung on his flaccid skin. The junk was down there, the treasure was too, though Parker hadn't been smart enough to find it. And now Abata had gone ashore. That fitted perfectly into a hastily concocted plan, brought it within the realm of possibility. He'd put one over on the doddering old fool of an American, and the too smart, young one. He'd show them their places. As for the Jap pig, there'd be a little surprise in store for him, too—after he found the treasure.

He got up, went forward, the coolie following him hang-dog fashion. For a long time after the Americans had rolled in their *pukai,* the dim figures of the Chinese were silhouetted in the bow, whispering. Parker fell asleep but Scott lay with an eye riveted upstream. Tang was plotting something.

After a time Tang picked his way past the sleeping crew and whispered Scott's name. There was no reply. He bent forward and heard Parker's rhythmic breathing. Stealthily he returned to the coolie. Scott rose on an elbow, his eyes glued forward.

The sampan was lifted quietly from the deck, put overboard. There was a moment of hesitation, then the coolie stepped cat-like aboard, pushed off. A low chuckle came from Tang. Scott edged over, watched through a hole in the mat awning. A short distance downstream the coolie sculled in—stepped ashore in almost the precise spot Abata had landed.

Scott lay down, reached under his *pukai* and shook Parker's arm. The steady breathing faltered. Scott whispered. "Lie still, boss, lie still. Are you awake . . .?" He pushed closer until his lips almost touched Parker's ear.

Parker's head remained prone but his eyes glinted. "What is it, kid?"

"The coolie's just gone ashore . . ." Scott had to talk fast, "...gone to meet Abata, landed in the same place . . ."

"Eh," Parker's lips firmed, "gone ashore . . . meet Abata . . . what do you make of it . . .?"

"They're going to team together, boss, Abata and Tang." Scott's breath caught. He wondered if Parker realized the danger in the new line-up. It was a death knell to their hopes.

"That means we're on the spot! They won't need us! They'll wipe us out!"

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Parker's voice could not have been heard above the plunging river. "I don't get Tang's idea . . ."

"He thinks you can't find the stuff," Scott interrupted. "He'll get Abata to find it."

"Then Abata will skip . . ."

"Tang'll be too smart to let him. He's probably got it all figured out or he wouldn't have sent the coolie ashore. Get a Jap and a Chinese trying to trick each other . . ." Scott smothered an ironic laugh. Parker was silent. "The way to heave the monkey wrench in it," Scott said suddenly, "is to find the stuff yourself, boss. Then we'll see . . ."

"I only wish I could," Parker said bitterly. "I'd have it up here in ten minutes."

"And in two hours, with the speed of this current, we'd be in Ichang," Scott put in, sotto voce.

CHAPTER VI.

TRICKERY AND TORTURE.

THE sampan was back on the deck when the two Americans got up the following morning. The coolie crouched over the native stove in the bow hold. Tang moved about, urbane and smiling. "Ah," he rubbed his hands. "How did you sleep, gentlemen? I've got a feeling things will work out after all."

"Fine," Scott said, "fine."

Parker was slapping his barrel chest with river-water. He doused his head, spluttered. "This life has kept me in condition, Mr. Tang. Nothing like an ice water bath every morning."

Tang grimaced. "Too hard on the flesh," he explained.

His discomforting thought was short lived. The coolie appeared with the steaming food.

Parker was anxious to get over the side. He believed with Scott that the way to circumvent any treachery was for him to find the tubes before Abata got them. But where were they? And would Tang be such a fool as to tell Abata they were in the junk instead of in the Fatshan? Parker doubted it. The whole thing was a muddle.

As Scott dressed him in the suit they exchanged whispered admonitions to keep alert, to watch for the first false move on the part of Tang or the coolie.

"You're taking a hell of a chance," Scott said.

"What else can I do, kid? If I stay here Tang'll know we're suspicious. If I go below—well, maybe I'll find something."

"Boss, you got guts."

Parker laughed, Scott closed the glass in the helmet, screwed it fast and Parker climbed down.

He reached the junk's deck and went forward to the cargo hatch. Pausing on the brink he wondered how he could get out once he reached the bottom. It was a perfect trap. He paused, looked aft. His mind reverted to the cabins. There was something about that grinning corpse that intrigued him—before chancing the hold he would have another look. He went back.

The grisly horror was more repulsive than when he had discovered it the previous day. The arm that had swung over the pistol had fallen to the floor during the night. The clutching fingers of the other hand, at an angle beside the grinning head, still retained their death grip and held the flesh-rotted frame on the bunk. What remained of the legs was spread wide apart, the toes turned in as though reluctant to leave even in the face of a trapped drowning.

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Parker stared, was held spellbound. There was something about the cadaver that fascinated him. His heart began to pound. His breath caught. It came to him like a flash of blinding light—

The dead man was shielding something with his body, had given his life rather than desert it.

Gingerly, Parker pushed the corpse to the floor. He saw that the bunk had a movable bottom. He looked over his shoulder. There was no one in the doorway. He went out and could see nothing save the Hakodate Maru's anchor chain, grim, ominous.

He returned swiftly, lifted the bunk flooring and found a small cavern. Of a sudden his heart stopped.

He was looking down at the ends of several circular tubes that protruded from a mound of silt. He picked one up. It was leaded at each end. He shook it and felt something move inside, something hard, rock-like. In an instant his mind was made up. He'd show Tang he'd found something, at the same time stop any treachery.

Carefully he put the cover back on the bunk, returned to the ladder and climbed up. Scott had caught his ascension signal and when he broke water Tang was kneeling over the side. While Scott helped him past the overhang, greedy yellow hands were prying carefully at the tube with an iron pump handle.

"Take it back there under the awning," Scott snapped. "Get it off the deck. For God's sake . . ."

TANG was too rapacious, to excited to hear. The end wrenched free. He tilted the tube. Out slid a silk wrapped bundle.

Feverish fingers unrolled it as the tube fell to the deck. A translucent, lambent, yellow-white statue came out. It was a Kuan Yin, China's Goddess of Mercy, about fifteen inches tall and of exquisite workmanship.

"Jade, jade, white jade . . ." Tang's fingers caressed it as he half-cried, half-whispered. His eyes shone avariciously. He hugged the figure to him, his face lighted, blood flushed his scar a livid red.

Suddenly he wheeled. "Any more? . . . There must be more. Quick, quick . . .!"

A metallic sound wafted from the Hakodate Maru. Scott and Tang whirled but saw nothing save the deserted bow of the ship that loomed ghoulishly over them.

"—a bunch . . ." Parker whispered.

Scott's fingers fumbled with the face-plate screws. "Get them. Abata's seen what you found. Bring 'em up and we'll cut this junk free and beat it if Tang starts anything. The crew is with us. I'll hold down up here."

Parker nodded.

"Quick, Parker, you fool," Tang snarled. "Get the others, get them, you old man." His voice was low, guttural, little more than a hiss.

The face plate snapped shut. Scott spun the screws. He bent forward, peered in at Parker and winked. Then he grabbed the pump handle, turned.

As Parker was half way down, the guide line with a weighed square of fish-net dropped past him like a plummet, was waiting when he reached the bottom.

His mind was a jumble of confusion as he hurried down-stream. If he could work fast, he'd beat Abata under the river, Scott could be depended upon to beat Tang above. And that "Parker, you fool, old man," he'd make Tang pay for that.

He knew his hand was on a fortune.

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If the other tubes were as productive as the one he'd found fifteen per cent would let him and Scott return to the States in style, with plenty more left in the roll.

He found the anchor of the Jap ship and got to the deck of the junk. Entering the cabin he saw the bunk cover was intact. He dipped into the silt and brought out eleven tubes, some heavy, some light, but all leaded, preserved, holding his future and that of young Scott in their copper-green interiors. His hands trembled as he spread the fish-net on the deck and tied the top in a knot. He went out. Abata had not appeared. His luck was holding. It was almost too easy.

At the foot of the Jacob's ladder he tied the bundle to the guide-line, signalled Scott. The answering taps came back. The tubes shot up.

It was done.

AFTER fifteen years he'd found the pot at the end of the rainbow. His reaction held him rooted, trembling. No more diving, no more abuse from Chinese employers . . .

Something crashed against his legs! His feet shot out from under him!

He toppled, fell heavily. He screamed but the sound echoed deafeningly in his ears. The air in his antiquated suit rushed up into his legs while the heavy helmet pinned his head to the river-bed. He could not get erect. He was trapped. But his air continued.

Squirming sideways he saw a figure standing behind him. It was Abata. He was holding a crowbar. The Japanese's suit was the latest word in equipment—overhead light, telephone, the new improved escape valve and the black air hose.

As Parker watched he saw the Jap's pock-pitted face moving behind the glass. He was talking with the Hakodate Maru. Parker's attention was distracted by a flash that returned with the guide-line. It was a slate and as it reached the bottom it stood half upright. He made out: "Watch for Abata. Tang—tricks—"

Abata demolished the slate with a kick. His crowbar smashed on the American's helmet with a venom that brought blood. It flowed from Parker's nose down over his chest, warm and nauseating. His temples threatened to burst. His legs, grotesquely over his head, swollen with air, pulsed like trip-hammers.

The Jap's mouth continued to move. Suddenly he bent, snatched the shark knife from around Parker's middle and held it before the American's eyes. He grimaced, laughed, grabbed Parker's legs. The knife was on the point of slashing the rubber suit when he paused. He had a plan, a diabolically clever bit of torture, traditionally in keeping with his heritage.

Grasping the helmet, he hauled Parker away from the ladder, a score of feet down-river. Then he dropped the knife a dozen paces beyond, where Parker could see it, perhaps crawl to it, perform his own hari-kari and cheat the death that was inevitable. He pointed to it, snarled something and was jerked to the surface.

Parker knew that to pull himself erect by his hose was impossible. It would snap. There was no other way. A death of slow agony awaited him. He toppled from his elbows in a faint, sprawled face down and lay still. Something was happening to his air. It was stopping. That meant that something was happening to Scott.

How long Parker was out he never knew. Consciousness came back when

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clean air flooded his helmet, ballooned his legs rigidly upright again. His nose had stopped bleeding. He was oblivious of the dull numbing in his knees. His head was still pinned down, his neck cramped.

Something in the yellow distance held his blood-shot eyes. It took him a moment to place it. It was the anchor of Abata's ship.

Sight of it stimulated him, brought fresh courage. If he could crawl!

He got up on his elbows, inched toward it.

The time seemed interminable but finally he was within range. He reached out, grasped a fluke and pulled himself in closer. His muscles tensed as he saw a small crevice in the rock beside the anchor. He maneuvered his feet in the hole and tried to pull himself up the fluke.

HE was praying for strength when his heart stopped beating. His brain reeled!

The anchor stirred, began to move!

Slowly, cautiously it was being drawn to the surface. Simultaneously there was a swirl of water above and he knew the screws were turning—the Hakodate Maru was creeping upriver!

As the anchor rose slowly from the river-bed he clutched it in a death cheating effort. He got his head up, his legs down, and loosed his hold, dropped to his feet.

A surge of renewed energy flowed over him. When he struck he was able to remain upright. He swayed against the current, fought doggedly to stand erect. Slowly his head cleared, his strength returned, the buzzing stopped. He took a step. He could walk. He started away from the dim shape of the junk—toward the Jacob's ladder. What was happening up there? What about young Scott?

He had gone half the distance when the hook crashed down on his left. She was anchoring again, closer to Tang's junk. He kept on, found the ladder that meant safety.

He began climbing, slowly, laboriously, each step tearing at his muscles, the suit heavier than ever before. A dozen times he paused, but after a momentary rest he kept on. Perhaps Scott needed him.

It was the slowness of his wearied plodding and the noise of the tumbling river that saved him. As his helmet broke the turbulent current his eyes peered through the blood streaked glass. A back was toward him, a broad, muscled back and nestled under a drawn up elbow was the butt of a machine gun. He knew who held it—the coolie.

In the split second that followed, a flitting panorama crossed his vision. He looked past the elbow and saw Scott beside the pump. One hand was moving the handle, but with each stroke the iron bar was being given a fraction of an inch turn. His intention was apparent. A dozen turns and the handle would be off—then Scott would spring.

Behind him squatted the scared crew. The coolie was holding them off with the gun while he harangued desperately in a loud voice, shaking a thumb over his shoulder at the Jap ship almost within arm's length. Parker did not need to hear to know he was taunting, insulting, enjoying the drama. The high bow of the Hakodate Maru shrouded the junk in a dismal shadow.

Parker saw Scott's avid gray eyes rivet on the helmet. His face was expressionless. He was acting better than Tang had ever acted. Suddenly

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the *laoban* discovered it, several others. They pointed.

The coolie half turned. In that split instant Parker's right arm circled his neck, pulled him backward. Scott leaped.

As the coolie hit the water, disappeared with a scream, Scott sprang erect with the rifle. He passed it to the *laoban,* clutched for Parker's helmet. He worked swiftly, surely, without a sound that would warn the ship aft. His hands tore at the turnbuckles, wrenched the helmet free and pulled Parker past the overhang. The *laoban* ripped off his denim shirt and swabbed Parker's blood encrusted face.

SCOTT'S voice raced like a phonograph: "The deal was on as we thought," he told only the essentials. "You spoiled it by finding the stuff . . . Abata must have telephoned, had a gang over here when it came up . . . tricked Tang . . . they held us off with guns, took Tang and the jades back . . . I talked them into letting me keep your air going, Tang thought it a good idea of torture to keep you down after Abata told him how he tripped you . . ." The gray eyes glittered, a grim smile hung on his lips.

There was much more, most of it escaped Parker, but one sentence aroused him with a blazing fury: "You sit here, boss, pull yourself together. I'm going back with this cannon . . ." He sprang to his roll of *pukai,* pulled out a pistol and thrust it in Parker's hands.

The crew were already arming themselves with the deck planking. Scott had grabbed the rifle, the *lodah* a pump handle. Someone eased the capstan. They fell back until the junk was touching the Jap's bows.

They went over her anchor chains like monkeys. Scott's broad shoulders, tousled head in the lead. Parker came out of his trance.

"Who sit here, me? What the hell . . ."

He thrust the pistol in his trouser pocket and climbed. It was an effort but he made it. If there was a fight he wanted to be in it.

As he straddled the hawse-pipe a burst from Scott's gun ricochetted dully off the hills ashore. A wild mêlée of rolling bodies, grunts, screams, brought a yell of triumph from the compactly knit, steel muscled figure. This was like the old days.

A shaven-headed Jap saw him, dove for his legs. Parker stepped aside, caught the Jap around the middle and lifted him over the rail. He struck with a splash, disappeared. A second came on, aimed a kick. Parker closed in, caught his arm in a hammer lock and threw him screaming against a bulwark. When he bounced back Parker smashed him flush on the jaw with a right cross. The Jap fell, lay still. Parker snorted, went on to where Scott had cornered a group behind the stack.

The Chinese swarmed over the deck. Taken by surprise, the Japs were trapped. They either submitted to being locked in a cabin or chanced the Yangtze.

Parker was standing midway to the wheelhouse steps when the door above opened and Abata's bullet head thrust out. A pistol came up in a direct line with Scott's back. Parker yelled, tore at the pistol he'd forgotten, left in his pocket.

Abata fired. Scott wheeled. The bullet went wild. Parker shouted to the *laoban* and plunged for the bridge steps.

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High pitched voices came from inside as he pounded on the door. Abruptly they stilled, the lock clicked, the door opened. Scott came up with the Thompson.

Abata and Tang stood inside smiling, beckoning. They appeared the best of friends yet each eyed the other, furtively, craftily. A half-dozen tubes lay scattered on the floor. One, left standing upright amid a pile of jades on the chart table, was filled with pearls.

TANG approached Parker, placed a hand familiarly on his arm. He smiled, save for his rasping voice he might have been in the Tung Shan at Ichang. He smiled at Abata, then whispered *sotto voce* to Parker: "This Jap pig kidnaped me with the jades. . . ."

Abata was grinning, his face close to Scott's. "This Chinese turtle has make agreements with me . . . you will see justice done, my frain' Mistair Scotts. Remember before time in Ichang I suggests we work together. I know this Tang is thiefs . . ."

"Didn't you shoot me in the back from up here?" Scott's hand clutched the long-gown, pulled the bullet head closer. "Didn't you . . ."

"I am excited . . ." he smiled ingratiatingly.

"And didn't you send a gang over there to kidnap the stuff? And you got Tang, too."

"This Tang's doings. He have planned all. He say, 'Make it look like kidnap . . . We have agreement. Come, now we split, my honorable American frain's . . ."

Scott growled, shoved him across the small room. He fell onto a bench. "Split hell . . . What have you got to split?"

Tang was backed against the wall. Parker stood before him. But the Chinese had not lost his aplomb. His voice was more suave than the foreigners had ever heard it.

"Ah, you Americans are smart. It is good you came, my young friend. And you too, dear Mr. Parker." He rubbed his hands, beamed. "After this Jap pig kidnaped me I suggested a deal, hoping for time until you got here." He winked shrewdly. "I knew you'd come. And your guarantee of two weeks, Mr. Parker, still holds. In addition, of course," he added quickly, "to the fifteen per cent . . ." He rocked back on his heels, showed his teeth in a wide smile.

"Say, what is all this?" Parker interrupted. "Who double-crossed who, and who did the kidnaping? Scott, let's take these two one at a time and straighten it out."

"Boss, we'd talk all day and never straighten it out. They'd lie faster than we could breathe. Here's my hunch. Both of them were trying to cross us, in addition to crossing each other. Say, I got an idea . . ." He grabbed Tang, pulled him to the table.

The pile contained more fabulous riches than he'd dared hope—a stalk of intricately fashioned lotus leaves in white jade, a score of carved Buddhas, a chaplet of pearls, a watermelon fully fifteen inches long and six inches through, the largest piece of jade he'd ever seen. He picked up eight galloping horses perfectly matched, an emerald lotus flower, a watermelon that had a green rind, red fruit and white seeds. He tossed them back, turned to Tang and Parker.

Splitting the pile in three sections with his arm, he pushed one toward the Chinese, another to Parker and drew one toward himself.

"Is that fair, boss?"

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"Looks fair to me. How about it, Tang?"

The pig-like eyes slitted. He looked at the Americans and realized they had outsmarted him. But he had an ace up his sleeve. He'd call on the crew, play their racial sympathies against the foreigners. He turned. Hardly had his mouth opened when the *laoban* spat in his face, cursed him with vicious diatribes.

"He won't make any deals with you," Scott snapped. "You pulled a gun on him and your coolie kicked his son overboard." The *laoban* caught what was being said. He nodded, gestured, slapped Scott's back. "Ah yah."

TANG turned back to the table and found the Americans packing their share in the opened tubes. Two not yet opened had been added to his pile, a similar number to each of theirs.

Reluctantly, his brain striving to find a way to outwit them, he took off his jacket and began filling it.

Scott and Parker finished and started for the door. Turning back, Scott called the *laoban* from Tang's side, gave him a roll of bills and a handful of pearls and motioned they were to be distributed among the crew. "Cumsha," he said. The Chinese grinned, pocketed them and went back to Tang's side. His searching black eyes played over Tang's features. The junk captain was not leaving him—not yet.

Parker started down the steps when Scott grabbed him. "I got a feeling . . ." Excited voices came from inside. Scott beckoned Parker to the front of the house. They peered in through a rifle slit in the shield.

Abata was arguing with Tang. "Half your shares belong to me. I found these jades — not that dog Parker . . ."

Tang thrust him aside. "You lie!" he said and went on cramming his pockets. The *laoban* was watching, his brown face impassive but his eyes slitted. Abata lifted the bench and rushed Tang against the wall. Tang's teeth sank in the Jap's neck. There was a scream, kicks, the crunch of smashing blows. The *laoban* grinned from his corner. Abruptly a silence fell. Tang clutched the inert body by the long-gown collar, dragged it to the steps and went down to the deck with it thumping on behind. The *laoban* followed.

The Americans looked on from the bridge. Tang lifted Abata, tossed him over the rail, leaned over and spat. "Japanese pig, we Chinese do not forget. . . ."

He came back to the house and went on filling his jacket, the *laoban* at his side. The Americans crept down to the deck. Tang came out, saw them, feigned a smile and started down, the junk captain still at his heels. Tang glanced sideways, looked at the *laoban*.

"What do you . . ." he began.

Suddenly the *laoban* leaped, grabbed the jacket, dropped it and wrested Tang to the rail. Tang might have been a match for the Jap diver but years of pulling the heavy sweeps had made the grizzled *laoban* a screaming, tautly muscled, revengeful knot of steel. The scuffle was short, vicious. The *laoban* lifted him, sent him hurtling after Abata.

The *laoban* picked up the jacket and passed it to Scott. "Number one," he said, grinning for the first time since his son had been killed.

"What'll I do with it?" Scott turned to Parker.

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"Hell, kid, we got enough. Tell him to split it."

Scott motioned. The junk captain shot a glance to the rail, spat, then he turned to the Americans, pondered, grimaced. He lifted the two unopened tubes from the packet and thrust them under Scott's arm. Then he bowed gravely, shook hands foreign fashion, called the crew.

"Well," Scott said, climbing over the bow and dropping to the junk, "looks like our luck's turned, boss."

"Yeh," Parker sighed, "it's been a long time coming. Now you're going back to the States and get a job and a girl . . ."

Scott glanced up quickly. "Hell, boss, we're both going, we seem to get along well together. Anyhow," he frowned, "I don't like the idea of running out on you. Here's the sampan, we'll be in Ichang in two hours if the current holds."

Parker nodded, squeezed Scott's arm. The kid wasn't going back on him even now. And it would be kind of nice to be with Scott, kind of nice to . . . Hell, of course, he was going back.

He stepped in the sampan, settled himself in the stern.

They looked up at the Hakodate Maru. The Chinese were clambering over the anchor chains. The *laoban* saw them, waved them on. Scott bent on the sweep and they shot downriver.

THE END

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MEN OF DARING
SUBSEA WIZARD
FOREMOST DESIGNER OF SUBMERSIBLE CRAFT, SIMON LAKE CHANGED NAVAL WARFARE BY SUPPLYING A NEW AND DEADLIER WEAPON. MILLIONS IN TREASURE STREWING THE SEA'S BOTTOM, SENT THERE BY SUBS, ATTEST THE EFFICIENCY OF HIS INSTRUMENT OF DESTRUCTION. TODAY, AT 69, LAKE IS SEEKING TO RECOVER SOME OF THIS TREASURE WITH OTHER SUBSEA DEVICES WHICH HE HAS INVENTED.
SIMON LAKE
BORN IN 1866 AT PLEASANTVILLE, N.J., LAKE WAS EDUCATED AT THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, IN PHILADELPHIA. AT TEN HE READ JULES VERNE'S "TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA" AND DREAMED OF SOME DAY BUILDING UNDERSEA CRAFT. IN HIS FIRST TRY AT SUBSEA NAVIGATION HE CAPSIZED A ROWBOAT ON THE TOM'S RIVER IN ORDER TO SEE HOW LONG HE WOULD BE ABLE TO KEEP ALIVE BY BREATHING THE AIR IN THE VACUUM UNDERNEATH. BUT A FISHERMAN, THINKING HE WAS DROWNING, CUT SHORT THE EXPERIMENT BY PULLING HIM OUT.
AT 17, LAKE INVENTED A CONTRIVANCE THAT WAS LATER TO BE USED IN HIS SUBMARINES. AT 20, WHILE WORKING IN A FOUNDRY, HE GAINED EXPERIENCE THAT LATER AIDED HIM IN HIS INVENTIONS; IT WAS IN 1895 THAT LAKE STARTLED THE WORLD BY OPERATING HIS FIRST REAL SUBMARINE, THE ARGONAUT, JR., A CRUDE COFFIN-SHAPED AFFAIR MADE OF WHITE PINE PROPELLED BY A HAND-TURNED CRANK ATTACHED TO A PROPELLER SHAFT.

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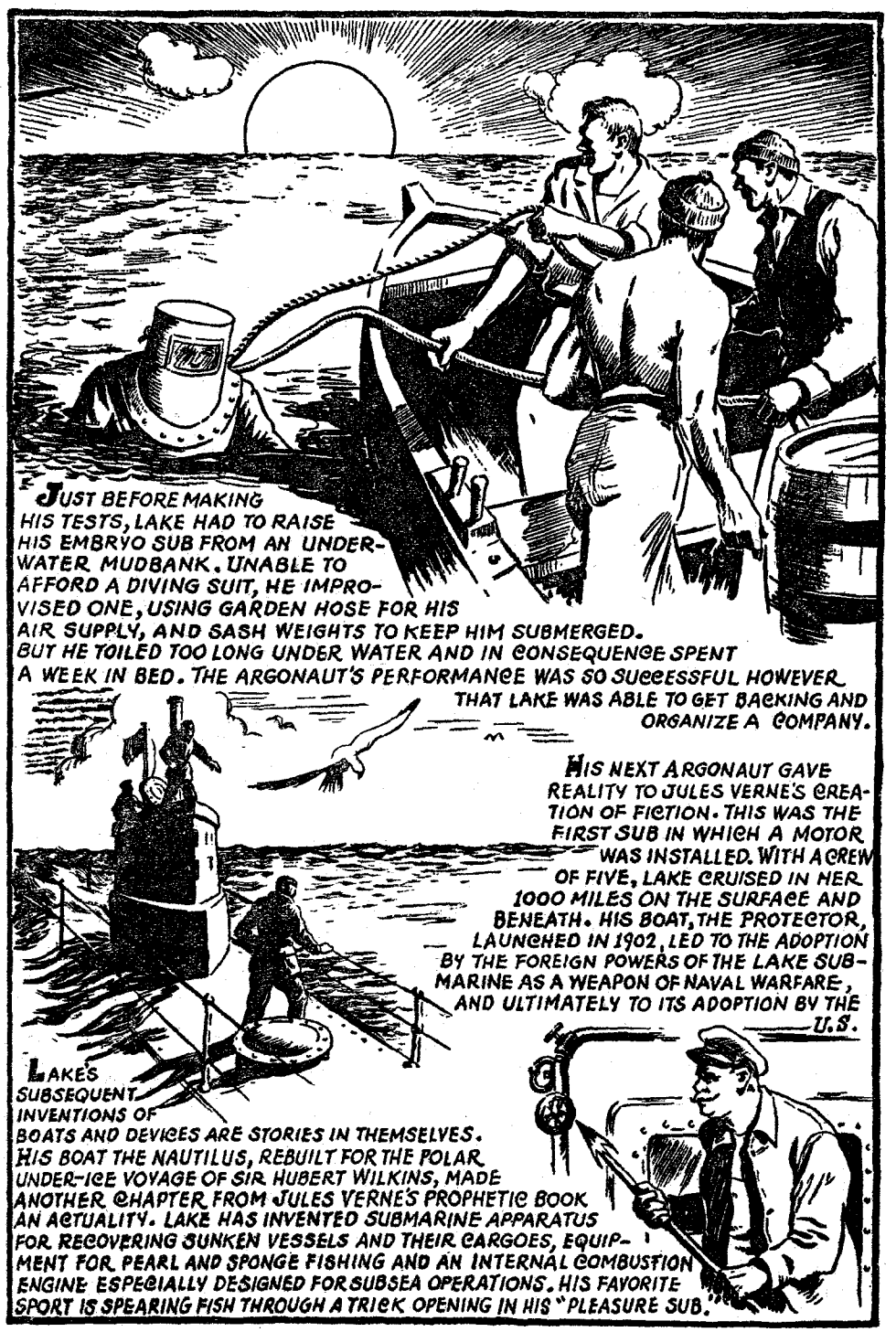
JUST BEFORE MAKING HIS TESTS, LAKE HAD TO RAISE HIS EMBRYO SUB FROM AN UNDER-WATER MUDBANK. UNABLE TO AFFORD A DIVING SUIT, HE IMPROVISED ONE, USING GARDEN HOSE FOR HIS AIR SUPPLY, AND SASH WEIGHTS TO KEEP HIM SUBMERGED. BUT HE TOILED TOO LONG UNDER WATER AND IN CONSEQUENCE SPENT A WEEK IN BED. THE ARGONAUT'S PERFORMANCE WAS SO SUCCESSFUL HOWEVER THAT LAKE WAS ABLE TO GET BACKING AND ORGANIZE A COMPANY.
HIS NEXT ARGONAUT GAVE REALITY TO JULES VERNE'S CREATION OF FICTION. THIS WAS THE FIRST SUB IN WHICH A MOTOR WAS INSTALLED. WITH A CREW OF FIVE, LAKE CRUISED IN HER 1000 MILES ON THE SURFACE AND BENEATH. HIS BOAT, THE PROTECTOR, LAUNCHED IN 1902, LED TO THE ADOPTION BY THE FOREIGN POWERS OF THE LAKE SUBMARINE AS A WEAPON OF NAVAL WARFARE, AND ULTIMATELY TO ITS ADOPTION BY THE U.S.
LAKE'S SUBSEQUENT INVENTIONS OF BOATS AND DEVICES ARE STORIES IN THEMSELVES. HIS BOAT THE NAUTILUS, REBUILT FOR THE POLAR UNDER-ICE VOYAGE OF SIR HUBERT WILKINS, MADE ANOTHER CHAPTER FROM JULES VERNE'S PROPHETIC BOOK AN ACTUALITY. LAKE HAS INVENTED SUBMARINE APPARATUS FOR RECOVERING SUNKEN VESSELS AND THEIR CARGOES, EQUIPMENT FOR PEARL AND SPONGE FISHING AND AN INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE ESPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR SUBSEA OPERATIONS. HIS FAVORITE SPORT IS SPEARING FISH THROUGH A TRICK OPENING IN HIS "PLEASURE SUB."

Next Week: Ward Van Orman, Peerless Balloonist

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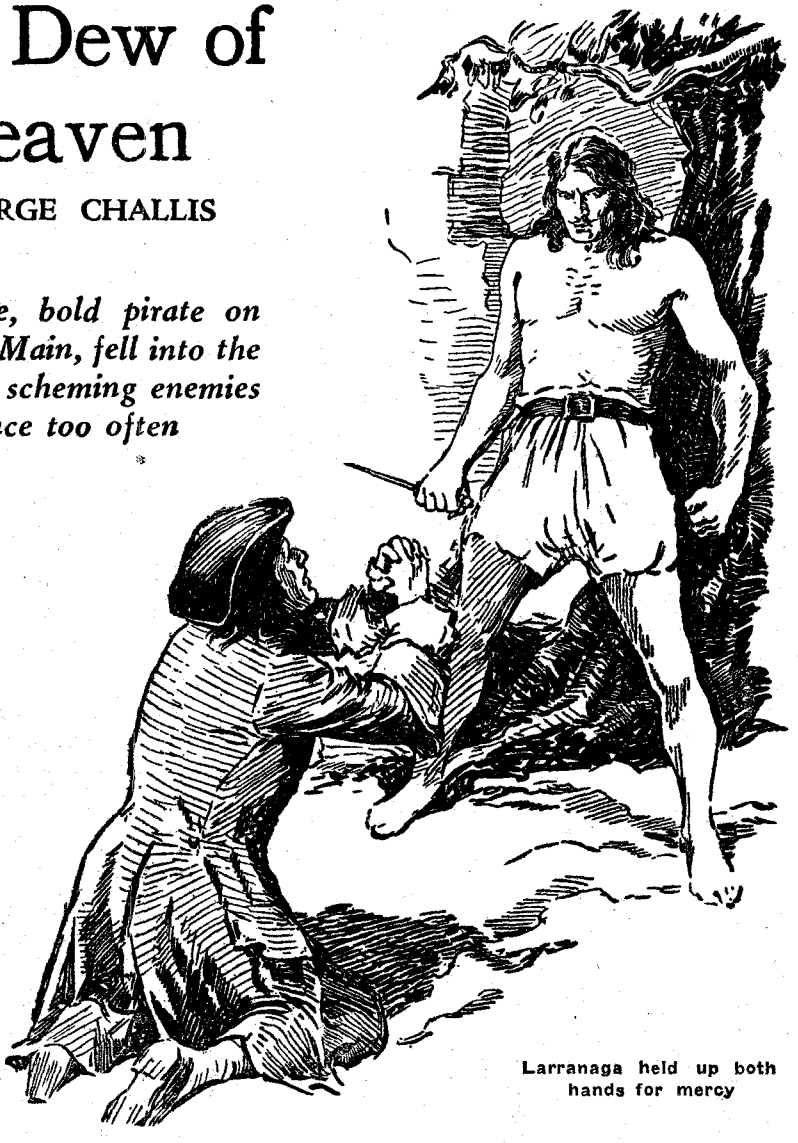
The Dew of Heaven

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Ivor Kildare, bold pirate on the Spanish Main, fell into the snare of his scheming enemies just once too often



Larranaga held up both hands for mercy

THE STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

LOUIS D'OR, notorious buccaneer of the Spanish Main, engages his ship in battle with a smaller craft commanded by Ivor Kildare, a young valiant pirate who is sometimes known as Tranquillo II. Louis d'Or captures Ivor and the beautiful Señorita Ines Heredia, who has run away from her domineering Uncle living in Panama.

As Ivor is about to be strung up, a Spanish galleon suddenly appears and Ines is put aboard a boat in order to delay the Spaniards who stop to rescue her. Ivor, in order to save his life, manages to translate a cipher carved in wood on the ship which reads: "Tortuga three steps from the black rock to Dutch John,"—directions for buried treasure. Louis and Ivor become friends and they sail on to Tortuga to locate the treasure. Suddenly almost

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all of their landing party become mutinous. There is much bloodshed, the only survivors being Ivor, Louis and Padraic More.

In digging for the treasure, they find a paper which reveals the next step in their quest: "Panama behind Peacock's Tail San Francisco." After rescuing Luis, a faithful Mosquito Indian, they all sail on toward Porto Bello.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN PORTO BELLO.

THE sun went down. In the instant darkness which followed, they entered the bay, sliding close to the "Iron Castle" on the western point. Henry Morgan had ruined the fort when he gnawed Porto Bello to the marrow of its bones not long before, and burned the town behind him. But the Spaniards simply moved in hordes of slaves and rebuilt the place.

They had to have a western port for the shipment of the southern treasure to Spain, unless they were to be driven to the long, painful and very dangerous passage south around the Horn.

So Porto Bello had risen, or, rather, it was still rising. When the periagua passed the "Iron Castle" and stood away towards the town, Castle Gloria presented a complete outline. But there were moving lights on the sandbank where Fort Jeronimo stood and the sound of voices giving loud orders, and the noise of hammer on stone and on iron. Plainly, gangs of the slaves were being kept at work by day and by night. Forts Gloria and Jeronimo were now behind.

"We're past the teeth of the danger; we're inside the throat," said Louis d'Or. "Now, Tranquillo, tell us what we are to do next?"

"We can't risk a landing," said Kildare. "That is, of course we can't tie up at a wharf." He raised his head and sniffed the air.

"The tide is out. I can tell that by the stench of the mudflats," he said. "But the tide is at a stand, now, and it will be easy to keep the periagua drifting. With an oar-stroke now and then, you can hold her in place. So sail by the custom house quay and I'll slip ashore there. I'll be back inside an hour, I hope."

"Tranquillo," said the Irishman, "you've been in Porto Bello, they know your face, and wouldn't they rather put knives into you than into a good bit of venison?"

"They would," agreed Kildare, "but they think of me now as one of Henry Morgan's captains in boots and silks and lace and feathers and all that. They won't know the thing they see tonight."

He stripped off his clothes as he spoke, tousled his hair, and stood up naked except for a pair of short trunks. The sun brown of his body was almost as dark as that of an Indian. His hair was fully as shaggy.

And he had an Indian's body, also, slender, rounded and deep in the chest only, with never a bulky weight of muscle but only a swift ripple of strength here and there.

"Ay," said Louis d'Or, laughing, "if I found you like that, I might capture you and sell you for a slave even though you swore that you were my Brother of the Coast.—Go ashore then, Tranquillo. But I must go with you!"

"You will stay here," said Kildare.

"I'll go with you. No man can fight numbers, unless there is a second man to guard his back."

"I shall not fight," said Kildare. "Someone might be scratched, here or there, but all they'll see will be the green of a cat's eyes and the flick of

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a cat's tail disappearing over a wall."

Louis d'Or and the Irishman began to laugh at this. In the middle of the laughter, Kildare listened for a moment to the noise of labor which pounded in Porto Bello by night, then he slipped into the water like a fish and went towards the quay of the custom house. When he reached the end of it, he could hear the bump and jangling of armed men walking their post, in military boots.

He simply worked his way a bit down the pier and then climbed out of the water. The sentinels with faultless regularity walked their post at the end of the wharf. They could report with perfect honesty that they had seen nothing. So could the inner guard at the side of the stone custom house. One of them heard a whisper, but whether of a voice or of bare feet, he could not tell.

While he was making up his mind, Kildare was safely in the long main street of Porto Bello. There were torches here and there to light the gangs of workmen. Some were clearing away the blackened ruins which had been left by Morgan's pirates. Others were laying stone or fitting great timbers in place.

And the rays of the torchlight flickered over the half-dried head, the tawny skin of Kildare and touched him with a fear as keen as the touch of fire. However, he got back through the twisting alleys until he reached the site of the house of Larretta, the big stone house of the rich merchant. There Kildare paused.

THE building was half-restored, and the work went forward now with a gang of a dozen negro slaves, under the eye of a foreman and a flat-faced Spaniard whom Kildare recognized as a clerk of Larretta. He would know, if any man, whether Ines Heredia had been sent back to Porto Bello and if so, where she was now in the town.

The clerk walked back and forth using a sheathed rapier instead of a walking stick. Sometimes he paused to brush at the mosquitoes which were eating him; sometimes he groaned with weariness; but men who served that stern-faced Larretta were not apt to forget their duty, whether by day or by night.

Near the torches of course there were more mosquitoes, gleaming clouds of them; so the clerk kept more to the darkness and it was easy for Kildare to come up behind him in the outer edge of the gloomy light thrown from the house. The noise of voices, of hammering, of pounding feet inside the house was ample to cover the softness of his approach. He pulled from inside his trunks that narrow-bladed little stiletto which was the small brother of his rapier, and touched the clerk on the shoulder, from behind.

"Pardon!" said Kildare.

The Spaniard, turning suddenly and angrily at the touch, saw the bare body and started to raise his sheathed sword to strike the impudent slave; then he saw the stiletto and stayed his hand; and as though by the glimmer of the bit of steel, he saw and recognized the man who confronted him.

"Tranquillo!" he cried.

But the cry was only a whisper.

Kildare touched his skin through the clothes with the needle point of the little weapon.

"Walk back with me into the darkness," he commanded.

His murmur taught the Spaniard to speak softly. "Will you murder me, *señor?*"

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"You are as safe as though you were sitting at home with your family. Come!"

They drew back into the dark beneath a cedar which by the grace of a strange chance had not been consumed when the town burned.

"What is your name?"

"Larranaga."

"Larranaga, I am going to ask you a few questions. If you answer them truly, you are safe. If you lie, I stab you through the heart."

The Spaniard rested his body against the rough trunk of the tree. A weight of terror was bowing his legs.

"How long is it since you have seen the Señorita Ines?"

"Eight days, *señor.*"

The answer plucked a great, sounding string in the heart of Kildare.

"Where did you see her?"

"In Porto Bello, *señor.*"

"Where is she now in the town?"

"She is—she is living in rooms which her uncle secured for her, in the top of the custom house."

"Ah? That is a lie!" said Kildare.

THE clerk fell grovelling on his knees and held up both his hands for mercy.

"*Señor,* you know the truth and I shall not attempt to deceive you. She is now in Panama, or nearing it if the mules are not lost in the horrible mud."

"Ah?" said Kildare, and a second stroke sounded in heart and in brain. "Why would they take her there?"

"Because they were afraid that Captain Tranquillo would never give her up, and that it would be best to take her from this unhealthy place to where there are so many soldiers—and where the buccaneers can never come."

"When did she start her journey?"

"Eight days ago, *señor.* I swear it."

"And you saw her?"

"Yes."

"Was she well?"

"Pale, *señor,* but calm and strong."

"Did you speak with her?"

"I only saluted her as she passed."

"Where will she be in the city of Panama?"

"In that place, also, there is a house belonging to Señor Larretta."

"Turn your face to the tree."

"In God's merciful name, *señor*—"

"Hush!" said Kildare. "I have promised to do you no harm."

With the man's own belt and other bits of his apparel, Kildare bound him firmly to the tree trunk and then gagged him, waiting until he could make sure that it remained possible for Larranaga to breathe.

Then he returned through the town. He was re-passing the custom house when he heard, out of the distance, a thin shouting that increased in volume, and then the beating hoofs of horses that flew down the harbor street. Crouched in a shadow, he heard men shouting. Their voices clashed together like violent echoes in a cañon.

"Tranquillo! Guard yourselves! Tranquillo is here!—The pirate, the great pirate!—Tranquillo!"

And from the churches, bells began with an immense clamoring, rattling like brazen pans, beat against the ears of Kildare. Almost at once, a gun boomed from Fort Jeronimo, and he knew that the signal had been heard, the alarm had been spread.

And all this might have been avoided if he had rewarded Larranaga for his lie with one stroke of the stiletto!

He slipped over the side of the quay and dived far under the water, swimming hard until he was out of breath. He came up at a considerable distance from the quay, and looking back he

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saw men running along the length of it, looking vastly taller and darker than human.

Swimming straight and hard, he was quickly at the periagua and aboard it.

"The devil is up! Hear him howling," said Louis d'Or.

A small fishing boat was coming out from the dark of the shore, and inside it they could hear excited voices that rose above the increasing uproar from the town. "Tranquillo!" was the name, everywhere.

"Give way!" ordered Louis d'Or. "We are still in the throat of the beast, and nothing but luck will bring us out of it. Each man to a sweep. Oh, for twenty pairs of arms such as I have seen working on this boat!"

"This is all for my sake and my fault!" said Kildare.

"Your cause is our cause; your fault is our fault," said Louis d'Or. "Give way, men!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SMOKE OF PANAMA.

THEY pushed the long, narrow boat ahead with wonderful speed. The sail was no help. There was not a breath of wind inside the flat bay of Porto Bello. And five men made a feeble crew for a periagua capable of holding thirty. Yet the great cedar log of which it had been built had been hollowed by fire and worked with the adze so skilfully that the remaining shell was both strong and very light, and the five sweeps pushed the periagua steadily onward.

A sound of many oars groaning against tholes came up behind them. They heard a command. Looking back, they saw the reaching prow of a long galley; the oars raised in a long row that gleamed in the starlight. Kildare could hear the water dripping swiftly and softly down as the great war-galley went by, with musketeers on her decked bows and more soldiers amidships.

Compared with the clumsiness of any sailing ship, such a vessel was like a spear to be taken in hand and hurled instantly at the enemy. The prow could tear a hole through the timbers of any ship; the single long, heavy cannon forward of amidships threw a shot of great weight, and the galley usually could be maneuvered so well and held so close to an enemy that a single shot from it might settle the fortunes of a battle.

So, with raised oars, the galley slid by them, and the frightful stench from the slaves on the galley benches wafted toward Kildare.

"Ahoy, periagua!" called a voice of hail.

"Ahoy, master," called Louis d'Or, changing his voice to a bawl.

"What are you?" came the imperious voice from the galley.

"Fishermen, master."

"Go fish at home."

"I cannot, master. Our nets are spread outside the harbor."

"Let the nets be damned."

"I will be damned by my wife if I don't gather the nets."

"Would you rather have a bullet through your hull?"

"Yes, master," said Louis d'Or.

At this, a great laughter came from the galley.

"Well, fool, go on!" said the voice of hail from the galley. "But do you know that Tranquillo, the great pirate, had been seen tonight in Porto Bello?"

"He will not wish to break his teeth on a dry bone like me," said Louis d'Or.

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There was more laughter. The great galley dipped its oars and with one stroke shot past the periagua.

And they went on, neither trying to hug one shore or the other, but keeping well out in the center of the channel past the sandspit where the greatest of the forts stood, and so on toward the Iron Castle which was the first guard of the entrance.

They came so close that they could hear the voices of men at talk and at work at the fort. Then a sudden scream came from the periagua.

"Treason! Treason! Here is Tranquillo aboard!

There was a splash over the side. François, the mulatto, was overboard.

Instantly, from the fort, came sharp outcries.

Kildare drew himself up and shouted in good Spanish: "Watch the shore, pray! Runaway slave — swimming straight in—there is a reward! Watch to take him, friends!"

The instant answer came not from the shore but from the water.

"He lies! It is Tranquillo himself who speaks! It is the freebooter! Fire, Spaniards, if you want a great death to your honor! It is Tranquillo!"

"Pull harder! Pull harder!" groaned Louis d'Or. "The devil has undone us all unless we are quickly out of these narrows."

They pulled till their eyes started from their heads, but they were still close when a gun spoke in a deep, slow voice of thunder. They could see the flash of the piece, and then hear the plump of the solid shot into the water.

It had landed short of them. But other shots would be more accurate, surely. Every piece at the fort ought to have the ranges of the harbor entrance clearly marked. By starlight the task would be more difficult, but now the moon like a traitor was rising in the east and casting a white path always into the eyes of the periagua.

THEY strained on at the sweeps. The periagua, turned leaden, pulled back against their hands. Then four or five guns exploded in a single volley. Kildare heard a cracking noise, and turning, saw a clean hole drilled through both sides of the periagua, just a little above the waterline.

Then his face turned cool. A breeze was striking them.

"The sail! The sail!" he yelled, frantically.

They got it up by jerks and starts. More guns sounded. A wide hole and then another appeared in the cloth, letting through the pale eye of the moon.

But the breeze was taking hold. The periagua leaned suddenly far to the side as the wind put its shoulder into the sail. And they slipped away from the danger of the last fort. More guns were bellowing, leaving a long echo to roll behind the fugitives through the bay of Porto Bello. But every shot fell short and now the guns ceased, entirely. Only certain trumpet calls whined faintly in the distance as the periagua took to sea with a freshening wind off the land behind.

It should not have been so. The wind should have blown, after nightfall, from the land to the sea; instead the custom was reversed, and the narrow boat took full advantage of it.

A blunt-bowed round-ship came billowing out after them.

They held up closer to the wind and the round-ship fell behind them, letting off useless guns.

"We are free!" shouted the Irishman.

"We have only begun," answered

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Louis d'Or. "You see that shadow to the leeward of the ship?"

Kildare, at least, could mark it plainly. Long and low, it came shooting out from the harbor, bending sail after sail, square sails on the foremast, lateens on the main and mizzen—low, stumpy masts, but throwing out very long wings of canvas to catch the wind.

It was a galley, perhaps the very one which they had hailed inside the harbor. And that cloud of sail, catching the stiffness of the breeze, shot forward the slender haft of the galley as a hand shoots forward a javelin.

There was no question of escape through speed, for the periagua. Valiantly its single sail caught the breeze, at such a rate that rowing was of little use; but the superior sail-area of the galley flung it forward on the very arms of the wind.

"Clear the gun," said Kildare. "Are you ready? Clear it and turn it on the pivot, and God bless the man that put such a device in our hands."

Ordinarily, the periaguas could shoot their single pieces of ordnance straight forward only, aiming them with the turn of the ship's bows. This was a different matter, and they were able to pivot the heavy gun.

The periagua, in the meantime, fell off into the trough of the waves, and the galley came up like a running horse. It was clearly within easy cannon shot, but still it did not fire, counting on taking the stagger in little craft hand to hand, without the risk of sinking the prize.

"Let me!" said Luis the Mosquito Indian, as the cannon on the periagua was loaded.

"If he can shoot at all with the big gun," said Kildare, "he can use it as you or I could use a pistol. Let him have it!"

They stood to the sweeps, therefore, the three white men, while the Indian remained by the gun, screwing it into position.

At last he called: "Fall down!"

THEY dropped; the gun boomed; white, stifling smoke swept aft into the nostrils of Kildare. He looked behind and saw the water lifted under the moon in a bright dash close to the bows of the pursuing galley. They were close enough to hear a shout of anger or fear from the galley. Frail as the periagua was, the galley was tenderly made for lightness and speed also, and one well-placed shot might smash it.

It gave to the port, then darted in again.

"Once more, Luis!" yelled Kildare, as he strained at a sweep.

And the Indian, after being frantically active at the loading of the piece, set it off again. The recoil knocked the periagua forward and well off its course. And from behind came a long, loud, endless yelling. A gun boomed from the galley, and the round shot ripped the air overhead, but even in those few moments, Kildare could hear the shouting from the galley diminish in force and volume.

He saw, then, that the foremost of the Spaniard had crashed by the board. The sail, trailing in the water, stopped all headway. The force of the wind in the after sails began to swing the craft helplessly around. Long sweeps were being put out again to right the course. Men poured forward over the foredeck to right the damage which had been done to the top-hamper.

"Sit down," said Kildare. "This is not the time for worry but for brandy! They will never continue this chase!"

The Spaniard did not follow. The

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periagua ran down the coast to the narrows of the isthmus and there landed. They found, as they had hoped, a small cove, and hove the periagua up into the mouth of a creek and there turned her upside down by the means of a good use of levers and tackle. They covered her, then, with green things. And then they held a council of war.

Kildare said to the Mosquito Indian: "Luis, we are going away for a long time. If you hunt up the Spaniards, they will be glad if you give them news about us. Do you hear? They will be glad to set a trap here for us, with the periagua as the bait, and fellows like the Spaniards will wait months to get such a prize as they think that we are."

The Indian answered: "Well, I have killed two Spaniards. I would rather kill one more than get from them everything that they can give. What have they? Only some yellow metal or some white metal and a man cannot eat that."

"You see?" said Louis d'Or, afterwards. "The man is a philosopher. He despises the goods of this world."

Their plans were very easily made. Luis the Indian would, he declared, be delighted to remain behind with the periagua. Its overturned hull gave him protection against the rain. Inside it were huge stores of powder and lead and guns and steel weapons of all kinds, and all that he needed to do was to see that the hull was covered with greens and that he struck enough fish every day to keep him in fresh food. This left the three white men to their own devices. And they took the shortest way through an argument by determining to follow the first stream up to the water divide and then down it toward the South Sea.

Each man took a musket, a supply of powder and lead, some bread, a flint and steel.

These were the physical affairs of their equipment. There were more important things, which they provided for with a brief set of rules.

One: If one falls ill, the two others will remain with him.

Two: If two fall ill, the third man will let them rot and go forward to accomplish the journey.

Three: He who grumbles at one meal shall cook the next.

Four: He who complains of any pain shall carry the muskets of both the other two during the next march.

Five: He who suggests turning back shall have no brandy for three days.

Six: In all matters, Captain Louis d'Or shall give the command, but where there is a difference of opinion a majority vote shall decide.

Seven: No Indians are to be killed, no matter how safe the killing may seem.

WHEN they had drawn up these rules, they plunged into the jungle.

That meant being wet from day to day, from dark to dawn.

At night they would kindle fires and try to dry themselves and their clothes, but, though the fires brought up a steam from the clothes and from the naked bodies of the men, no one ever was dry. The clothes were always wet. In the heat and the moisture the cloth began to rot. It tore with the putting off and the pulling on. To show what the moisture and the warmth would do, they came on a deserted Indian village where the coals of the last fires still were black, but the thatch, the huts and all their poles were already mildewed and turning green.

They handled the gunpowder like salt, drying it recklessly, close to the fires. But still their guns missed four times for every one when the powder

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would ignite. In the first two days they ate the last of their provisions.

In the next three days they had nothing whatever in their bellies except the river water. But they kept on, fixing their eyes before them, dragging themselves from point to point.

In the end, they would have to invade a large, armed town and try to fumble through a great church in their search for treasure, but no mention was made of the goal of the journey.

Spaniards were no longer terrible, as they marched through the steaming forest, sprouting with palms, hung with long beards of moss. All human beings seemed to them like brothers.

So they struggled forward, sometimes never speaking during the course of twenty-four hours.

All the time that their bodies were being assaulted by fever and weariness, their minds and spirits were being hammered and heated and rehammered into a finer sort of steel. They forgot the treasure which was their goal. Instead of treasure, they had for a purpose merely a goal. Towards it their wits and bodies were strained.

They reached the water-divide. They saw the waters of the streams beginning to slope down the way toward the great South Sea of Balboa. And then they could take greater steps, their knees buckling under their own weight.

In all of this, it was noticeable that the Irishman was the most enduring. Habit or nature kept a faint grin on his face. The sunburn left his nose. His face grew astonishingly pale.

Even his freckles became faint. But his spirit never wavered. Next to him stood Kildare—or perhaps even above him in sheer ability to march, seeing that his body was so light. Captain Louis d'Or suffered more than the other two. Having been in finery, he was now in the worst rags. But he made no comment until, at last, they came out of the western woods and saw before them not the outlines but the smoke of Panama.

CHAPTER X.

POOR PEDRO.

IT was a great town on the beach of the bay of Panama, built between the rivers Gallinero and Matasnillos. It was the greatest European city in the New World, perhaps, at this time. Seven thousand houses stood inside its limits. The great Spanish galleons were even in its harbor, unloading, refitting, loading to carry supplies to the rich south. Houses were built of native cedar or of fragrant rosewood, and some of stone, after the fashion of Grenada, the upper stories leaning out over the streets.

The cathedral of St. Anastasius was perhaps the most splendid building in the whole of the Americas, its great tower looking far out to sea, a landmark to sailors. And every stone was carved!

It was a city of merchants who lived rich lives, spending their hours and their money freely to forget the heat and the mosquitoes.

The King of Spain was strongly represented, with soldiers and with mules. The mules lived in long barracks, ready to carry the gold from Peru over the isthmus to the galleons which awaited the rich shipments in Porto Bello and other places. And there were two hundred storehouses of merchants with sheds sloping away from them for the sleeping quarters of the slaves.

It was a defensible city, because at

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high tide an arm of the sea put in across the savannahs and almost encircled the place; but on the whole Panama was defended not by forts but by its distance away from rovers, the impenetrable jungles of the isthmus being the living barrier between it and the danger from the buccaneer or other enemies.

The harbor was safe enough, but shallow. At low tide the long reach of mud stretched shining towards the sea; at high tide the southern houses might be invaded; because of this, ships did not land at piers, but were loaded and unloaded by means of tenders.

But it was a rich place, with gardens towards the landward side. Vegetables grew in squares and strips of well-manured land—manure was cheap from the king's stables. And there were guavas growing and alligator pears that taste like butter when they are fully ripe.

This was the greatest market in all the world for gold and silver, and perhaps no finer pearls ever were found than those fished out of the bay.

To the three fugitives, looking from the slopes over the green savannahs, past the pointed roofs of the old town, over the blue of the great bay, over the sweet green of the islands, and far away, the Andes gleamed like a distant and a gilded promise, a heavenly cool prospect in the far edge of the sky.

The three travelers looked at the view and they then pulled their belts more tightly about their gaunt waists. There was much work to be done, and talking was not the way to do it.

After that, they set forward along the road towards the town, a broad, straight road that grew better as they drew nearer and nearer to the smoke of the city which kept streaming up in clouds above the place. And every step, they knew, was taking them closer to a danger which might swallow them all, at a gulp.

They thought of the galley slavery, and said nothing; of the tortures of the Inquisition, and bit their teeth harder together.

All three were hunting treasure; one was hunting for the woman he loved. But in another sense none of them was hunting a thing except that other side of the world, that chance of throwing himself away which keeps men forever adventuring until the soul has died before the body.

They drew nearer, the size of the town reaching constantly wider and wider, pushing its roofs higher, the tower of the great church standing up like an angry arm, raised to warn them back.

Jogging hoofs and bells came up behind them. They saw a man running on his bare feet through the dust, beating a pair of donkeys before him, and they were loaded with flapping, squawking chickens, and with living kids.

The chickens were tied to the rear of the packs. Sometimes they flapped their wings wildly and tried to rise from their jolting perches. Sometimes they remained roosted. Sometimes they lost all balance of foot and of wing and hung at the length of the cords, head down. As for the young goats, a pair were slung over the bow of each saddle. Their feet were tied together, and so trussed, they were hung head down.

THEIR tongues lolled out. Their eyes were turning dim. Their bleating was uncertain and weak, but if they lived to the end of the journey they would be sold as fresh food, which was worth, in the heat of

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that climate, five times the value of meat slaughtered out of sight. No man, and hardly a woman, would trust the nose to declare what meat was safe and what was not. The Andes, after all, were much too far away to furnish snow for refrigeration purposes.

Here there was a thick grove of palms. And the three had halted in the shade. A rubbing with walnut juice, expressed from the bark of the nuts, had made them dark enough to pass as Spaniards or half-breeds. Their clothes were exactly as ragged as those of any of the poor of the land, and they all spoke Spanish like natives. So they were safe enough except for a close investigation.

Kildare, looking back at the approaching donkey-driver, murmured: "There is my passport into the town of Panama, friends."

"How?" asked the Irishman. "You wouldn't leave us, Tranquillo?"

Kildare sat down on the edge of the road, which was banked, and looked at his tired feet.

"Catch the man, bring him to me," he said.

When the half-breed came running up at his dogtrot, Padraic More took him by the nape of the neck and carried him to Kildare.

"Well done," said Kildare.

"The English!" moaned the half-breed, when he heard that speech, and fainted, so that he hung like a rag from the big hand of the Irishman.

Padraic More dropped him face down in the dust.

"Will he choke in the dust?" asked Kildare, leaning, curious, to watch the breathing of the fellow.

But little clouds of dust kept rising. The man still breathed regularly enough.

After a time he recovered himself and sat up. He sat on his heels and held out his hands, imploring.

"If you are going to eat me, my lords," he said, "kill me quickly. I am not a full-blooded Spaniard, and therefore my flesh will not taste better if you roast me alive."

"Do we eat the Spaniards after we have roasted them alive?" asked Louis d'Or.

"God and your noble lordships know the truth!" said the poor fellow.

"We only cook people who refuse to talk," said Kildare.

"Thank God I have learned to speak," said the half-breed.

"The truth?" asked Kildare.

"The naked truth, *señor!*"

Kildare took out his rapier and rubbed the blade of it until it shone.

"Take the goats off the saddles," he told the Irishman. And to the half-breed: "Why do you carry the goats head down, you dog?"

"*Señor,* but are they Christians?"

Kildare could not find an answer to that.

"You know the city of Panama?" he asked.

"As well as I know my two hands," said the other.

"You have heard of a rich merchant named Larretta?"

"Lordship, who but Pedro serves him with fresh goat twice a week?"

"Pedro, when were you last at his house?"

"Five days since, only."

"What was the talk there at that time?"

"The head cook has bought two new pigs to eat the garbage of the place. Better garbage than the new food that most of us eat!"

"Inside the house what was the talk?"

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"Lordship, what am I to listen inside the walls of such a great house."

"PEDRO, you listen everywhere. I know you. I see it in your flat eyes. What was the talk inside the house?"

"I only stood under the window for five minutes, and God defend me. I cannot tell how you knew!"

"And you heard what?"

"There are three great ships coming to Señor Larretta from the south coast."

"What else?"

"Some wine—"

"Damn the wine!"

"*Señor,* let it be damned. Let everything happen as you will."

"To whom did you hear Señor Larretta talking?"

"To a rich lady, *señor.*"

"Ay, and what was her age?"

"She was very young."

"His wife?"

"He is not married, *señor.*"

"His daughter?"

"I cannot tell."

"By what name did he call her."

"By the name of Ines, lordship. God forgive me if I have named the wrong name!"

He fell on his knees, for Kildare had taken a great breath and closed his eyes.

"Stand up," said Kildare.

The man rose.

"Where is the house of Larretta?"

"Above the wharfs, just above the mark that the water leaves at the highest tide."

"On what side?"

"You could never fail to find it. Let me show you the way! No? Then you can tell it by its white face. And it is built with so much rosewood that your lordship could follow your nose to the place. It is to the southeastern part of the town."

"Tell me another thing."

"Everything that I know, lordship."

"There is a church of San Francisco?"

"Have I not prayed there?"

"Is there a peacock in the place?"

"In the church? God forgive me! *Señor,* Spanish churches are for Christians, not for beast or Englishm—" He clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Where is the church of San Francisco?" asked Kildare, suddenly smiling.

"It is the church with the two low towers, not a hundred steps from the house of Señor Larretta. *Señor,* let me show you the way!'

FOUR bleating kids, twenty croaking chickens, were a passport that brought Kildare readily into the town of Panama, even though he took the most guarded gate. The soldiers were too glad to have the noise away from them, and when the sun went down and the sudden, tropical darkness poured like a black river over the city, windows flew open and harsh voices cursed the racket which Kildare carried with him through the streets.

In a way, it was as though he had carried a flaming torch before his face, so that the Spaniards might recognize a proved enemy.

But the greatness of the noise, on the other hand, was like a smoke to obscure him. A pair of gentlemen on muleback stopped to curse him—and then price a pair of roosters. But he made no sale until he had reached the depths of the town. There he put the poor, half-dead kids on their feet, tethered the donkeys, and went to the house of Larretta.

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It was high tide. There was no smell off the mudflats, now well covered, and the soft noise of the waves, coming in through the shallow of the beach, kept the air pleasantly alive and brought a freshness of salty savor through the hot town.

Kildare, wriggling his bare toes in the dust, stood watching the house of Larretta for a long time.

There was a wall around it. He climbed the wall, dropped into a garden of flowers and palms, and with unhappy thoughts of snakes and spiders in his mind, crossed the damp ground to the inner wall. There he found the tall side of the house, strongly built of stone below and of wood above.

He rounded the wall until he heard the voices of women and dropped on a bare knee to hear them more easily. One voice had the harshness of Indian speech in it, the incurable roughness with which Spanish comes off a foreign tongue. The other was a gentler sound. He could not make out the words it spoke, but he recognized the savor of the voice of Ines Heredia.

Then he went up the wall like the cat he was. His sword hung by a string inside his skirt and from around his neck, so that it was a small burden. His dagger was inside his trousers. And so he reached the window above, and hooked his hard fingers over the ledge of it. There was a foothold beneath on the rim between the stonework and the wood, so that he could stand at ease.

"Tell my uncle that I am not going to dine with him. I am not going to dine at all," said the girl.

There was another flow of protest.

"I shall not change my dress," said Ines Heredia, "because I wish to be alone."

"But the *señor* has spoken a wish—"

"He speaks too many wishes," said Ines. "Leave me!"

The Indian woman puckered her face in spite. Already she was composing the message which she would carry back to the master. Then she turned away and left the room, banging the door loudly behind her.

It was a big room into which Kildare peered. It was hung around with that delicate Mexican featherwork which was becoming a lost art, almost, and this kept a light whispering through the place, so that the sound seemed cool even when there was hardly a breath of air.

The girl went to one lamp and put it out. She had gone to the second and was leaning over it, her hair brightened to a dim flame about her face, when Kildare spoke her name.

She started, but then came straight toward the window, calling out in a hushed voice: "Ivor? Ivor?"

He slipped through the window. She tried to run and catch him in her arms, but he held up his hand.

"I'm covered with the street dust," he said. "If you touch me, you'll be marked, and that uncle of yours may come up at any moment to see you again."

"Take me away with you, Ivor!" she begged. "Take me now, before you have a chance to think again. But have you come a l o n e into Panama?"

"I left some friends outside the walls. Stand closer to the light. There—that's better. Seeing you is better than drink. Better than food, also. I cannot take you away through the streets. But I'll come again."

"If you go and leave me, my brain will turn, Ivor. You've managed to come into the city once, but you'll never come again. My uncle has post-

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ed descriptions of you even here. He knew that you could not come to this place, but still he would take no chances, and the reward is published on your head, here."

"See for yourself," he answered. "If I take you into the street, you'll be seen."

"I'll make my skin dark, as you've done. How hideous you've made yourself, Ivor!"

"If you make your skin dark, still you won't walk like an Indian girl. And they have torches carried through the streets. I've come to see you not because I have a chance to carry you away, but to tell you that I'm here."

SHE sat down, suddenly, as though from weakness, and needing support. She wore a dress of the thinnest white linen with a tenuous robe of blue silk thrown over it; and there was enough of the sea-breeze through the window to give a life to her hair and to her garments. Kildare, staring constantly, felt his mind enriched and all his labors rewarded.

"Tell me what's happened," he said.

"Nothing. I was recognized on the ship. It belonged in fact to a friend of my uncle. And at Havana I was transhipped to Porto Bello, and then straight overland to Panama. That was all. My uncle still quakes when he thinks that you may find me again.

"And he shudders still more when he thinks that my fortune may slip out of his hands when I marry—even if I'm married to an Englishman. There is nothing else to tell, Ivor—only misery—waiting—despair of ever seeing you again. Talking doesn't help that. And you?"

He looked up at the ceiling, thinking.

"Well, I've found you," he said, "and that's all that matters. And I'm here looking at you—and have to leave once more. But God knows that this moment makes the world stand still! Is your uncle unkind?"

"He talks. But what is talking to me?"

"Is there a marriage in his mind?"

"Of course, but I smile at him. He tells me I am a traitor to my father and to him—but I still smile, and that makes him curse."

"I'm coming again," he said. "Not tonight. But if I reached you from the sea, with a boat in waiting out there—then that would be different? We could carry you off!"

"I have two feet that will carry me, Ivor. I don't need to be thought of like a bale of goods!"

They were silent.

"It's strange how calm we are," said Kildare. "My heart beats as steadily as a clock. There isn't a leap along my blood. When I heard your voice I turned to stone—but now it seems as though you'd never left me."

"Because we both forget whatever went before loving each other," said the girl. "Everything else is silly and dull; like a thing we've dreamed and never lived."

Beneath the window, from the garden, a man's voice said: "This was the place. It was under this window."

And the voice of Larretta said, angrily: "This is the window of the room of my niece just above us. You say he climbed up from this place?"

"There was very little light. It looked like a mountain lion or a jaguar climbing, at first, but then his head turned, and I saw the face of a man—the paleness of a man's face—"

"Hallo!" shouted Larretta. "Jose! Ricardo! Antonio! Hallo! Thieves!"

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Kildare waved his hand to the girl.

"What other way out?" he asked.

"There is no other way out."

She started to stand up, and fright dropped her back into her chair. Kildare walked straight past her, paused once to look into her face, and then went on through the doorway.

Larretta was crying, outside the house: "The room of the *señorita!* The room of Señorita Ines!"

KILDARE heard the girl moan as he closed the door behind and shut himself into the dimness of an outer hall. Footfalls came rushing. He stepped inside the stiff folds of a great curtain and waited until the noises of panting and scuffing feet had gone by him. Then he moved again. They were up the stairs, beating at the girl's door. Her thin, steady voice was answering: "There is nothing wrong! I don't want you in here!"

Kildare smiled briefly, and went on down the hall. The steps wound to the left. They led him to a big, open hall, and across this to the main front entrance. The hurlyburly of the voices was all upstairs and in the garden.

So he picked up a big rug of fleecy goatskin, one of the huge skins of a mountain goat, wrapped a chair inside it, and with this apparently heavy burden on his shoulders, stooping, shuffling as though from the weight, he pulled open the heavy door, closed it behind him, and walked down the steps.

A squad of half a dozen soldiers came on the charge—so well was the house of Larretta guarded, so dear was he in the eyes of the authorities of the place. But they cast not so much as a glance at the peon under the high-built load. They bumped him aside and stormed on into the house.

Kildare turned into the street, dropped his load behind a hedge, and went back to his two donkeys. He turned loose the chickens in a cackling flight, let the goats stand where they were, and went on down the street, stepping in the soft thick of the dust, and leading the two weary animals behind him. For the sort of work that he still had to do this night, he wanted to make no noise, and the donkeys without any load on them would be recognized and serve as a passport to him when he wished to pass out through the gate of the town again, as he had entered.

In the meantime, he had seen Ines, he had the assurance worth more than gold, that she would be steadfast; and now he had to think of his two sworn brothers who waited for him outside the walls of the city of Panama.

On his left there were two blunt towers against the stars—the towers of the church of San Francisco, no doubt. He marked them, then hurried on.

The noise behind him had died out. Another in front of him began to grow, and as he turned a corner, he saw in a flare of marching torches two men chained heavily together.

A third man walked in front with the step of a conqueror. It was he that Kildare recognized first—the big head, the scrawny neck and shoulders of Pedro the donkey-man; and behind him, bloodstained, drooping, walked Louis d'Or and Padraic.

CHAPTER XI.

BLOODLESS CAPTURE.

IF it had been day, assuredly the crowd would have killed the prisoners; and certainly the soldiers who guarded them lifted not a hand

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to prevent the missiles which were flung. A gang of small boys ran naked or almost so beside the captives and threw at them clods of earth or whatever sticks they could find. A stone thrown in this manner had cut the head of Louis d'Or and caused the blood to stream down his face; but he strode along with a perfect unconcern as though he were unharmed.

And, as he went by, his glance turned piercingly through the darkness and found Kildare. He did not start or in any way indicate his recognition of a friend. Only with one hand he made a slight gesture whose meaning was clear: "Away—and save yourself!"

But Kildare followed in the crowd with the smoke of the torches blowing back about his face. The light made a tunnel through the darkness, an endless passage, and Kildare had a stifling sense of helplessness.

The procession reached the prison. It was a square-built chunk of stone, two stories high, with little iron-barred windows all around it; and a moment after the captives had been taken inside, a light glimmered in an upper casement. Loud voices sounded from the same place, and the unmistakable sound of blows falling on flesh. Kildare bowed his head and leaned a hand against the wall of the building.

The crowd remained to cheer the capture of the English dogs for some time, but after a while it departed in a body, as though governed by a single will. Somewhere inside the jail an iron door closed and sent a long, harsh echo through the building; then there was stillness except for the sobbing of a woman on the first floor. Between sobs, she asked God to forgive her and let her die quickly. And Kildare gritted his teeth harder than before.

A pair of guards appeared around the corner of the building, the starlight glittering on their musket barrels. Kildare faded back into the darkness and let them pass, watched them come around again with a regular step. They, or others, would continue the march on the beat regularly until the morning. For a jail which contained English "dogs" needed special watching. That was clear.

As they turned the next corner the second time, Kildare ran to the wall. He had picked out his way beforehand, having noted that every fifth row of stones in the masonry projected a little. It was not a large projection in any case, but it was regular and it afforded a grip for fingertips, a purchase for toes.

He was halfway up the side of the wall when the regular marching step passed again beneath him. He was at the window of the cell he had marked out before the guards made the next round.

"Louis—Pat!" he called through the heavy iron bars.

He heard a clinking of chains.

"I'm here," said the guarded voice of Louis d'Or. "But they've taken Pat to the torture. Tranquillo, have you turned yourself into a bird?"

"At least, I hope that I'll be able to pick a way out of the place for you, Louis." He was busily fumbling at the sockets of the iron bars. "They've used plenty of mortar to hold the bars; and if I can pick it out—"

He snapped the blade of his poniard. That left a short, stiff bit of the finest sort of steel, and with this he began to chip quietly, steadily at the mortar. It came away in the smallest of morsels until he had defined a small trench; after that he was able to break out larger and larger portions.

Half-sitting in the casement, half-

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clinging to the bars, he continued the chipping steadily. And beneath him, round after round, he heard the sentinels marching. If they looked up and saw the dark blotch of his outline against the stars—

Louis d'Or, inside the cell, was saying: "There is nothing that can be done! Why do you try, Tranquillo? Even if you get inside, the chains are bolted into the wall."

"But sunk with mortar around the head of the bolt; and I can chip that away as I'm chipping this."

"Go on, then, in the name of God. It isn't the dying that matters, but the way the devils will kill us. They're killing Pat now, I suppose. But an Irishman that locks his teeth on an idea is not apt to do much talking. They'll get no confession out of him, and without a confession they're not apt to put us through many steps to hell. A hangman's rope, and that's soon over."

"What happened to you?"

"THE simplest thing in the world. A troop of soldiers came down the road. We hid near it. I had a knife at the throat of our chicken peddler to keep him from making a noise, but he yelled out anyway, like a brave fool—and somehow I hadn't the heart to cut his windpipe for him. They took us. No use running from their horses. No use fighting against twenty. We said that we were poor shipwrecked sailors. They said that all the English were shipwrecked as a rule and always poor, and generally pirates. So they wrapped some iron chains around our necks and took us away."

"You could have said that you were French."

"I said it and talked it," said the buccaneer, "but all white men who are not Spanish are 'English,' in this part of the world, and not to be trusted."

Kildare, having worked a deep trench around the base of the iron bar, continued now to waggle the iron from side to side. It moved very slightly, then with a greater motion, loosening in its upper socket as well as the lower.

He stopped when he heard a sound of steps coming down the hall. A key grated in the lock of the door, and then it was flung open. Kildare, hanging by his hands from the edge of the casement, peered over the sill and saw, by lantern light, the huge bulk of the Irishman carried into the room, his big head fallen over to one side, his mouth agape, his eyes closed in death or insensibility.

They flung Padraic More down on his face and let him lie. One of the jailers kicked the prostrate body. "English swine, if *I* had had my way, I would have made you talk! I would have made you describe the whole way to the hell you're bound for!"

They went out and closed the door, calling over their shoulders: "You that call yourself French—you hang tomorrow. May the knowing of it make you sleep better!"

Kildare pulled himself back into the casement.

"How is it with Padraic More?" he asked.

A groan from the floor answered him, and then a long-drawn, whimpering moan of agony. The complaint ended suddenly with a clicking sound of set teeth. Padraic More had returned to consciousness.

"How is it with you, Pat?" asked Louis d'Or. Then the big Frenchman said: "There's the third of us, brother, perched like a bird on the window and chipping the mortar to get the iron loose."

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"Is it Tranquillo?" said the Irishman. "Ay, all the storms in hell would never keep him from a friend.—But he is not for me. May'be I'll never walk again, Louis."

"What did they do?"

"I couldn't be talking about it," said More. "There's a taste in my mouth when I think of them, even. When I think of the Spaniards, there's a taste in the back of my mouth that won't come out till it's been washed clean with blood."

Kildare, with a sudden effort, wrenched out the bar. A bit of mortar fell, bounced from the sill, and sailed down into the darkness. He heard the spat of its fall against the ground. But the marching step of the guards had not yet turned the corner. Now Kildare was able to slide a leg through the gap in the bars and sit with a greater comfort as he attacked the second bar. His hand was sore from the work, but he knew the method of it, now, and even the starlight showed him in part where he was striking. The mortar came out more rapidly, as though it were softer at this place. To make amends for that advantage, he had to dig more deeply.

BUT that bar, also, presently was loose at the base. He worked it back and forth in its socket as he had done with the first one. But the top stuck with a strange resolution. Using both hands, with a violent tug at last he broke it out with an effort that almost toppled him from his place. A good portion of the stone in which the top of the bar was set was also displaced in this manner and, though he caught at the falling fragment, it escaped from the tips of his fingers.

He looked down, with a groan in his throat, for the two guards had just turned the corner, and the fragment thudded solidly, exactly at their feet.

"Who's there?" called one.

And then a flash of fire, the boom of a report, echoing harsh and flat along the wall of the jail, and the impact of a leaden bullet close to Kildare.

"Turn out!" shouted the sentinels. "The English — they are breaking loose!"

Kildare slid through the gap he had made into the cell.

A sudden tumult had begun all through the building. There was an outcry from nearly every cell, and in the midst of it, Kildare, fingering his sword, knew that he was lost. He reached that judgment, and sighed.

"Out the window again, Tranquillo!" breathed the Irishman. "Out and take your chances on the wing. It's better to die fighting than to be hanged."

"There is no chance that way," said Kildare, calmly, "and the best way of dying always is with friends."

A moment later the door of the cell was thrown open, and a bristling array of pikeheads and musket barrels and sword-points crowded the opening. The waver and dance of the lantern light struck wildly over the faces of the Spaniards.

A fellow in a short coat and a feathered hat on his head came in through the press, shouldering his way roughly. There was a certain nobility and even a beauty in his face, but it was as cold as stone.

"Ah?" he said. "Three instead of two? Two decoys have brought down the wild hawk, eh? What are you?"

"An Englishman," said Kildare, his sword in his hand but the point of it lowered.

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"A poor shipwrecked mariner like the other pair?" asked the officer of the jail.

"I am whatever you choose to find me," said Kildare. "A dead man among other things, I suppose."

"Two of the bars are gone, captain," said one of the men.

"Did you do this?" asked the captain.

"With the point of a broken dagger."

"How did you reach the window?"

"By climbing."

"That is not—" began the Spaniard. But then he paused and stared fixedly at Kildare. "There are gentlemen in all countries, I suppose," he continued, still staring, "and brave men everywhere. Will you give me your sword?"

Kildare took it by the point and handed it over.

"It's more like a great needle than a sword," said the captain, "but a very swift hand could make lacework of men with heavy rapiers. *Señor,* you are English, and that is against you. You have broken into the prison of Panama. I respect your courage. The governor shall hear of you. But you will wait for his answer in that set of chains."

Kildare walked to the wall, where a heavy set of rusted irons lay on the floor.

"I am ready," he said.

The captain looked down at the sprawled, half-helpless form of the Irishman, who had raised his bulk on his elbows.

"If I had known that you had a friend of such a cut as this one—" said the captain, "well, it might have gone better for you."

Padraic More said nothing. He stared with a complete and childlike hate at the captain who suddenly turned and left the cell. An armorer was already fastening the chains on Kildare, and he murmured softly as he did so: "There are ten English scars on my body, dog! There shall be more than ten on you, in spite of the pretty talk of the young fool of a captain. This is a night to remember in Panama! Three English captured and not one drop of blood spilled!"

CHAPTER XII.

GALLEY SLAVES.

IT was mid-morning of the next day when the door of the cell was thrown open again and a pair of soldiers stood on the threshold. Between them appeared Ines Heredia; and the voice of the rich Larretta sounded behind her: "Do you recognize any of them? Have you seen any one of the scoundrels before, Ines?"

She looked straight into the face of Kildare and gave no sign. Then she turned toward big Louis d'Or and the Irishman. She was shaking her head as she stepped back again.

"I don't know them," she said, with a perfect calmness. "But why do you hang three strong men who could be used in the galleys? In the galleys they die, also, but you have the use of them. The galleys kill a negro in a year but you know that an Englishman lasts for five times as long."

In the doorway appeared Larretta himself; Kildare bowed his head, as though in despair.

"Two of them look strong enough," said Larretta, "but the third one is a skinny wretch. However, since he's English, we may be able to get work out of him. I think I'll advise the governor to transfer them to the galleys.

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If they hang, we have only a moment of pleasure. If they go to the sweeps, we have years of use."

The door closed and was locked.

"She minds me more and more of my girl in Ireland," said Padraic More. "She looked at you, Louis d'Or, as though you were no more than steam out of the mouth of a kettle. And now she's giving us life in the galleys instead of death at the end of a rope!—But, Tranquillo, what would have happened if Larretta had seen *your* face?"

"The rack for all of us, and then the stake," said Kildare.

All Panama turned out to see the three Englishmen—for the complexion of Louis d'Or made him seem one of the hated Islanders — marched through the streets towards the wharf. And long howls of delight came from the crowd when More, who was scarcely able to walk after the torment he had endured only the day before, was helped forward with a whip. Luckily for him the walk was not long. By the wharf they found the galley, and looked down onto the squared superstructure where the slaves sat at the benches, three to a sweep, and twenty sweeps to a side.

Naked except for loin-cloths, sun-blistered and sun-blackened, they lay or sat in strange positions, striving to find attitudes of ease; for all were chained in place. The majority were negroes; Indians and half-breeds were few, being races of a weaker stamina and apt to die in a few weeks of despair and hopeless labor. But there was at least one man of northern blood, a fellow with long white hair, his body hunched by age as much as by toiling at the oar.

He seemed, in fact, far too old to be in the galleys, but over the hunch of his shoulders sprang two great cables of strength.

The galley was about to leave harbor for a cruise; sailors were busy with the top-hamper of the two big, stumpy masts, and the soldiers lolled on the platform forward. To the rear, under the canopy, stood the commander, the steersmen, and a fellow seated at a raised bench with a wooden gavel to beat the rhythm for the rowers.

At the edge of the wharf the clothes were being torn from the three recruits. They were marched not to a single bench, but each to a separate place, where old and practiced rowers would be able to show their duty to the newcomers. Kildare was chained in the middle between the brainless face of a great negro and that same old, white-headed man whom he had noticed from the wharf.

The sun already was beginning to sear his flesh and throw a lightness into his brain, when a man came up the central raised walk that ran the length of the galley and paused near Kildare. Fumes and heat poured from the charcoal brazier in his hand. Out of the brazier he drew something—a shadow moved over Kildare and then a thousand hornets stung his shoulder.

He heard the hiss of white-hot iron and smelled the singeing of his own flesh. That upward leap of Kildare, that yell that burst from his throat while his chains jangled, drawn taut, brought a loud chorus of laughter from the sailors and the marines of the fighting corps.

But the slaves uttered no sound as another man was branded and added to the life without hope. Negro and white, they looked straight ahead. Some of them shuddered a little, remembering. The man with the brazier went on. A loud curse from the Irish-

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man told where he had gone; and then a phrase of snarling French proved that Louis d'Or had been branded in his turn with the tell-tale letter.

BUT a moment later orders were being given, the ropes were cast off and the galley put to sea. The commander, in full armor except for the head, stood under the canopy and spoke quietly. Beside him stood a boatswain who repeated the murmured order in a loud bellow.

The Spanish commander was the noble knight Pedro Alvarez and his nobility appeared most of all, perhaps, in the way his eyes overlooked the wretched slaves who rowed in his galley and concerned themselves only with the blue of the sea that expanded before the prow. He wore a narrow, delicately tapering beard and mustache to match; but the chief token of his dignity was in his armor. Whereas most nations preferred half or three-quarter armor, now that guns had been improved to such a point that a direct hit would smash a bullet through any sort of steel worn on the body, the Spaniards were apt to cling to the full fashion of complete plate; and Pedro Alvarez was equipped from head to heels in steel that was covered with golden chasings. And, sailor though he was, he did not fail to have on his heels a pair of gilded spurs. If anyone had told him that the costume was absurd, he would have replied that his father and his grandfather before him had been armed in exactly this manner and he had sufficiently good Castilian blood to prefer their ways.

The gavel of the rowing-master now began to beat, but Kildare was too rapt in his thoughts to pay much attention. The result was that something whistled briskly past his ears and a four-thonged whip fell on his back. Along the thongs were knotted bits of metal which cut into the flesh.

The heavy whip in itself delivered a blow of sickening weight, and afterwards Kildare could feel the warm running of the blood down his back. He glanced up and saw the broad-faced disciplinarian of the galley standing with a grin on his face and the whip raised for a second blow.

Kildare gave his weight to the handle of the big sweep and swallowed something in his throat that was colder than a stone and more bitter than brass. When he glanced towards the noble Pedro Alvarez a moment later, he could see that the proud gentleman, though still looking out to the blue of the sea, was smiling a little.

That smile left in the soul of Kildare a taste which never would quite leave him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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McRory could stand the insults no longer

The White-Haired Boy

By R. V. GERY

Captain Osmond seemed too nice to be human, but what he did to that Latin-American revolution was a different story

IN the sun-smitten roadstead of Concepcion Do Sul five vessels lay at anchor. Four of them were freighters—prosaic, matter-of-fact sea tramps, blunt in the bows, big-bellied for cargo. The fifth, a little withdrawn from them, was a resplendent fighting ship, a ten-thousand-ton treaty-pattern cruiser, lean, gray-clad, sinister. From her peak floated an ensign—a brand-new flag of blood-red hue.

Captain Osmond of the Tantallon, the newest arrival among the freighters, paused on his way to the side and stared at the bright bunting.

"Odd!" he observed mildly. "Very odd. What flag's that, can you make out, Mr. Dockery?"

Dockery, his first officer, had glasses up and was scrutinizing the warship intently.

"Beats me, sir!" he confessed.

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"Looks as if they'd borrowed the parlor tablecloth for a change. It's no nationality I'm familiar with."

The captain nodded. "Well, they'll tell me ashore," he said. "I'm going to see the consul and get clearance. Meanwhile, I'll be glad if you'll start cargo moving as soon as the lighters come out. We'll be sailing tonight."

He dropped down the ladder to his waiting boat, and Dockery looked after him with pursed lips and a puzzled expression. After six weeks of command, the Tantallon's new skipper was considerable of an enigma still to her ship's company.

He was a small, birdlike person, with baby-blue eyes rimmed with white eyelashes, a gentle voice, and the aspect of a surprised cherub. So far on the cruise from the Mersey, he had done nothing to belie his looks, either. Prim, precise, and gentlemanly beyond all reckoning, he had the hard-bitten Tantallonites guessing.

McRory, the ship's engineer, a vinegary Scott with a rasping Clyde-side accent and a long nose, came out of his cabin and joined the mate.

"Aweel," he said slowly, "there's the wee felly awa'. An' whut d'ye make of him noo, Muster Dockery—a cock-angel descendit upon earth, or maybe a bit—"

He tapped his forehead suggestively and Dockery grunted.

"He's not human," he said. "Nobody could be as damned polite as all that. It's just not natural!"

McRory spat overside, his eye still on the retreating boat.

"Aye—the nesty wee blatherum-skite!" he commented acridly. "Yam-yam-yammerin' at the head o' the table, an' 'Muster McRory, wull ye verra kindly pass the mustard?' an' 'Muster McRory, I'll trouble ye to be so guid as to hand me the salt!' Ou, aye, he's no human—he's plain indecent, if ye ask me!"

His jaundiced eye roved round and fell on the cruiser.

"Ma guid losh!" he exclaimed. "Whut's yon red-flannel petticoat he's flyin' there?"

"Just what I've been wondering," said Dockery. "If it wasn't that—"

STROUD, the second mate, had been in the wing of the bridge, also examining the scene. He came suddenly across to the others.

"Say," he said, "look here, sir. There's something damned odd hereabouts. Notice anything about these other fellows?"

He indicated the three tramps, and Dockery and the engineer followed his finger. They lay peaceful and silent, rolling gently in the long swell. Dockery whistled all at once.

"They aren't doing any loading—" he began; and Stroud grinned.

"It's a sacred fact, sir," he said. "There's not a winch turning on one of 'em!"

There was not. Their companions' cargo-slings hung ready, but no cable whirred through a sheave. For an excellent reason, too; no lighter was in attendance upon them, or lumbering out from Concepcion's shores. Dockery leveled his glasses at the town and swore violently.

"Why, hell!" he said. "The ruddy show's shut down—there's not a soul on the wharves! And"—he peered again—"oh, by thunder, gentlemen, there's some damned bobbery or other going on there. Look—what's all that in the main street?"

He handed the binoculars to McRory, who took a long squint. There were indeed curious matters going

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forward in Concepcion Do Sul. The waterfront might be deserted, but the town itself was seething with activity. The streets were black with people, moving to and fro in organized bodies, meeting, checking, and coalescing like swarms of black ants. The engineer lowered the glass, and his dour Scots visage lit up with swift comprehension.

"D'ye know what?" he said in tones of the highest glee. "They're revolutin' ashore there, that's aboot it. An' that"—he jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the cruiser—"is the meanin' o' that dom duster he's showin' so verra rambunctious!"

The mates stared at one another and then at the Tantallon's boat, moving deliberately shoreward in the middle distance, its oars a-spraddle like the legs of some gigantic water beetle.

"By gad!" Dockery whispered. "The skipper! They'll—they'll eat him alive!"

McRory cackled appreciatively.

"Aye, they'll so!" he proclaimed. "There'll be no yam-yammerin' wi' those billies. It's no the kind o' stuff they'd unnerstand, I'm thinkin'—"

Mr. Dockery grabbed him by the arm and spoke winged words. "Shut up, and come on!" he enjoined. "Willy-boy or no, he's the skipper, and we can't let him go perambulatin' right into the hands of those mugs there. Mr. Stroud, get a boat away—and look sharp about it!"

ASHORE, Captain Osmond marched equably to the consul's office on the quay, and knocked.

"Come in!" said a harassed voice.

The Tantallon's master entered, to find the consul, a thin, nervous man in pince-nez, anxiously conferring with three blue-clad men who were obviously the skippers of the other tramps. At sight of Osmond he frowned.

"Oh, Lord!" he observed plaintively. "Another of 'em! Well, there's nothing doing, captain—nothing doing at all. I can't help you!"

Captain Osmond registered mild surprise and laid a trim despatch case on the desk.

"Nothing doing, sir?" he queried. "I don't quite understand, I'm afraid."

The consul's frown deepened.

"Well, there's no freight for anyone here, if that's clear enough," he said irritably. "And if there was, you would not get it loaded. I suppose it's freight you're after, eh?"

Captain Osmond smiled. "Well, yes, to some extent, sir," he said. "I've a small consignment for Concepcion. But if there's any difficulty, I can look in on my way back. Just now I'd like you to pass my papers for clearance, so that I can get on."

"Papers?" The official stared as if such routine matters had slipped his mind altogether. "Oh, ah, yes—papers. Let's have a look at them!"

He flapped over the documents, and his eyebrows shot up.

"What's this?" he demanded testily. "San Tomas? You're bound for San Tomas?"

At mention of the name the other three captains, who had been muttering acrimoniously in a corner, suddenly turned, and one of them—a big, hairy fellow—chuckled sarcastically.

"Well?" the consul repeated. "What about it? What's the idea, asking me to clear you for San Tomas?"

Captain Osmond's innocent blue eyes widened a little. "Why not, sir?" he asked reasonably. "Any objection?"

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The consul opened and shut his mouth like a fish. "Objection!" he spluttered. "Ob— Why, hell and blazes, man, haven't you heard?"

"Heard what, sir? I've heard nothing."

"Mean to say— Here, you carry radio, don't you?"

"Yes, I carry radio, of course, sir, but—"

"Then, for God's sake, didn't you pick up anything about this affair here? The air's been lousy with it for four days. The revolution, I mean."

Captain Osmond shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't concern myself much with shore news, sir," he remarked. "My operator's got other things to do than listen to—er—gossip. What's been going on here, sir? Nothing serious, I suppose."

"Serious!" The consul appeared on the verge of apoplexy. "Serious! Oh, my soul—d'ye hear this, gentlemen? Here have you and I and the lot of us been half-dotty for seventy-two hours, and now Captain Osmond walks in and asks if it's serious! Didn't you see the cruiser down there, man—the Almirante Balboa?"

"Cruiser?" Osmond echoed. "Why, yes—there was some kind of a gunboat or other—"

"Gunboat!" shrieked the consul. "My sainted Aunt Jemima, listen to him! That's the Almirante Balboa, my friend, and the damn *revolucionistas* have got her, and—"

He broke off choking, as if the idea were too much for him.

THE big skipper cut in with heavy sarcasm.

"Oh, tell him, tell him, sir!" he said. "Maybe he can find a way out of it, since he's so bally cool about it all."

Captain Osmond favored him with the eighth of a mild blue glance, but the consul was pacing the room fretfully, and now spoke.

"It's like this, captain," he said. "These blasted spigs—they've gone off the deep end for fair, this time. I've seen revolutions down here before—used to 'em, in fact—but nothing like this one. The lid's off, and that's a fact!"

There was a growl of assent from the three, and the consul proceeded with a kind of grim relish.

"They've shot or hung old Ribeira, the president. They've collared the army, by all accounts, and as for the navy—well, there it is, out yonder in the road. They've got Garcia, who is the only real man the loyalists had, boxed up in the citadel down at San Tomas, if he's not surrendered yet. And they've stopped all traffic—kerplunk! Like that!"

Captain Osmond was looking dreamily out of the window at the cruiser's long, low bulk. He seemed to be thinking.

"You mean I can't discharge or load at San Tomas, sir?" he asked.

"I mean a hell of a lot more than that," the consul snapped. "You can't get to San Tomas, my friend—the spigs won't let you. That so, eh, Captain Copeland?"

The big man said it was so, with sundry purple embroideries. He, too, it appeared, had business at the port of San Tomas—urgent, pressing business—and frustration sat supremely ill upon him. But Captain Osmond was distressingly cool still.

"Oh, I don't think it's so bad as all that," he observed. "Treat these fellows right, and there's not so much to them. Naturally, though, you've got to show 'em you're not afraid of 'em."

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Captain Copeland went purple.

"Are you talkin' to me, mister?" he demanded thickly. "You're not hintin' I'm afraid, are you? Because if you are—"

It took the consul's immediate and tactful intervention to smooth the aggrieved mariner down—and even at that he was not completely successful. Captain Copeland continued to regard Captain Osmond with a bellicose and contemptuous stare.

But the little man seemed entirely oblivious. He pushed the ship's papers across the desk.

"I'll ask you to sign these, sir," he said. "And then I'll be getting along, if there's really nothing doing here—"

"Don't you be an ass!" the consul exploded. "You'll end up against a wall, if you're not careful, looking at a firing party. Anyhow, where's the use? The Almirante Balboa won't let you move."

CAPTAIN OSMOND'S little air of sweet reason did not alter by the flicker of an eyelash. "Oh, I dare say I'll manage all right, sir," he said. "It's mostly common sense, after all."

His smile would have done credit to a stained-glass saint, but Captain Copeland jumped as if some one had thrust a pin into him.

"Why, damme!" he vociferated. "Now you're hinting we're just a lot of cursed idiots, eh? Mostly common sense, is it? Well, you listen to me, Mr. Common Sense—the consul here's right! You can't get outside that road, for the cruiser won't let you. And even if you could, I'll lay you three months' pay to a sixpence you'll never see San Tomas—"

Captain Osmond had been regarding him with pained surprise.

"Dear me!" he observed. "You seem very—er—positive, captain. Well, I'm not a betting man, of course—it's against my principles. But since you're so foolish to suggest it, why, I'll make an exception for once and oblige you. Three months' pay to a sixpence, you said? Very good—here's the sixpence, and I think we might ask the consul, here, to hold the stakes."

Under Copeland's goggling eye he produced a silver coin and laid it on the desk. There was an awkward little silence, and then the consul laughed.

"Well, captain," he inquired, "going to let him get away with it? Put up or shut up, you know!"

Captain Copeland hesitated an instant. Then he dragged forth a plump wallet.

"No, confound it!" he snarled. "There's no lily-handed, white-haired boy putting one over on me!"

The Tantallon's master was smiling beatifically as he gathered up his papers and reached for his cap.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!" he said, and bowed himself into the street. Once there, he glanced about him at the milling crowd of revolutionaries.

Concepcion Do Sul was enjoying itself supremely. The streets were full of enthusiastic, swarthy *politicos*, abuzz with rapid-fire chatter. On every corner orators orated, gesticulating wildly over the heads of their listeners. The *cantinas* were jammed to the doors and overflowing with earnest-minded citizens, busy as bees and, like bees, sallying out now and again in noisy, cantankerous swarms.

Red flags were everywhere, borne by scowling partisans at the head of processions or decorating the rostrums of the "liberty-or-death" spellbinders. And every man, woman and child sported a red cockade—a plastron-like

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bunch of scarlet ribbon. Vendors hawked them, the windows of the stores were ablaze.

Captain Osmond stood on the pavement outside the consulate, fingering his chin, a far-away look in the blue eyes.

Then he made a sudden little sound, between a snort and a laugh, walked rapidly across the road, and entered one of the brightly adorned stores.

MR. McRORY, a hundred yards away, was scowling at the mob with the true Scot's contempt for the antics of the infidel.

"Dom pack o' fules!" he proclaimed. "An' they ca' this a revolution, eh? Foosh, I'd mak' a better revolution out o' six drunken billies in a dram-shop by the banks o' Clyde. 'Deed aye, an' I would!"

Dockery nudged him.

"Quiet, you ass!" he muttered. "You'll have some of 'em on your collar if you go on like that—and I'm not here for a row. I'm wondering where the skipper's got himself to."

He looked round a trifle uneasily, and what he saw did not allay his alarm.

There were already black scowls directed at the two officers, and the crowd was massing ominously. Dockery plucked at the engineer's sleeve.

"Come on!" he said. "We'll get a move on, Mac. I don't know—this seems to me a good place to get out of!"

"Fuddlesticks!" said McRory valiantly. "D'ye think I'm rinnin' awa' from a wheen greasy dagoes wi' the pip? Na, na, Muster Mate—no' for Alec McRory! Come ye on wi' me, now—I'm needin' a drink this minute, an'— Whoosh! What's these fellys?"

He paused, watching a little group of half a dozen men thrusting their way toward him. They were a curious and, to a seaman's eye, a slightly unsettling spectacle. Clad in cheap, much-creased civilian clothes, they wore—perched askew on their heads—the full dress, gold-laced cocked hats of naval officers. Upon their breasts shone the inevitable scarlet cockades, and an instant's consideration showed that they were not a little steeped in liquor.

"Judas!" said the mate under his breath. "The cruiser's lot, eh? What's coming now, I wonder?"

He was soon answered. The leader of the group, a scraggy personage with a little chin beard, halted dramatically in front of them.

"*Capitalista, ha!*" he declaimed in tones muzzy but full of menace. "'Ow do you say?—damn bourgeois!"

He brandished a grimy fist under McRory's nose, so close to it that the Scot recoiled.

"Ma guid mon—" he remonstrated.

But the revolutionary was not to be put off thus. He pointed with a horrible sneer at the insignia of rank upon McRory's sleeve.

"*Capitalista!*" he repeated, to an undercurrent of applause from the crowd. "Bourgeois—damn peeg!"

McRory's acquaintance with the niceties of proletariat abuse was a limited one, but the final words registered blisteringly enough. His clenched and horny fist took the speaker hard under the bearded chin and stretched him flat in the gutter.

"Ye would offer, eh?" he remarked venomously.

There was an instant's stunned silence all about them, and then the pair found themselves in the nucleus of a scrimmage that seemed to consist entirely of flashing eyes, clawing hands, garlic, and curses.

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Instinctively, back to back, they edged toward the wall, their fists going piston-wise, plock-pluck upon skull or jawbone, their brows knit determinedly, their breath coming hard. It was a cheerful little set-to—or might have been under less explosive conditions. But just now there were unpleasant possibilities in the air. A knife glittered, and then another. From somewhere back in the crowd came the spit of a pistol, and the bullet smacked into the wall with a disconcerting thud.

"Crimes!" Dockery gasped. "Let's get out of this!"

A clear, calm voice broke suddenly in on the strife.

"Drop your hands, Mr. Dockery! You, Mr. McRory—behave yourself at once. What on earth's the matter with you?"

THE mob swung round at the interruption, staring, and the Tantallon's two officers stared as well. Captain Osmond was walking down the center of the street, placid and pink and white as ever, despatch case in hand.

He advanced upon the foaming man with the beard, and his subordinates noted with stupefaction that he wore an ornament in the buttonhole of his trim jacket—a cabbage of crimson ribbon, brilliant in the afternoon sun.

"Ma certes!" McRory whispered hoarsely. "Wull ye look at yon? Losh, I'm dreamin', for I'm no drunk!"

"Shut up!" hissed Dockery. "We are not clear yet—"

Nevertheless, under their astonished eyes a change came over the crowd, swift and dramatic as an April day. The bearded man, to whom Osmond was speaking in fluid, melodious Spanish, merely gaped at him for a moment, then he seized his hand and pumped it up and down vigorously, to the accompaniment of a flood of turgid, hysterical gabble from the crowd. Something resembling a cheer arose.

"Good Gad!" said Dockery in awe-struck tones. "What the hell's all—"

Captain Osmond turned over his shoulder. "Get back to the ship, gentlemen, if you please," he said coolly. "I'll be off in a while, I expect."

Dockery and McRory retreated to their boat in a stupefied silence. It was not until they were clear of the shore that either found tongue. Then the engineer passed a hand across his brow.

"Weel," he said bemusedly, "I've seen some michty odd affairs in ma time—michty odd! But so far, yon's the leemut. Muster Dockery, tell me d'ye no think so?"

The mate was looking back at the town, where Captain Osmond was still visible, surrounded by a swarming circle of the elect. He shook his head.

"The ruddy limit!" he pronounced. "The ruddy, perishing limit!"

IT was deep dusk before the Tantallon saw her master again. He came aboard, brisk and unconcerned as ever, and sent forthwith for his officers.

They gathered in the chart house, wonderingly, and Captain Osmond addressed them in brief, colorless phrases. He still wore the revolutionary cockade flaunting in his lapel, but his demeanor was mild as ever.

"We sail in the morning, gentlemen," he said. "You're—um—aware, no doubt, that there's trouble where we're going; but I don't want any of you to imagine that—er—anything you see or hear necessarily represents my own reasoned opinion on—well, political matters.

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"To put it shortly, we're after that freight in San Tomas, and we're going to get it, one way or another. So if you'll kindly coöperate by executing all orders rapidly, unquestioningly, and —er—without looking more like imbeciles than Providence intended you should, we'll probably get along very well. If not, we shan't—and you'll be sorry for it. That's all, gentlemen, thank you!"

And he passed out of the chart room into his cabin, closing the door softly behind him.

McRory looked at Dockery, and Dockery looked at McRory.

"Weel," said the engineer, "thot's worrds, sure enough; but whut's the meanin' in 'em, or the precise signeeficance o' yon wee hint aboot bein' sorry an' sae forth—thot's beyond ma puir comprehension, freen's. But there's just one thing; I dinna ken whut whigmaleeries he's up to wi' the reds yonder, but thot billy wi' the beard—he's ma meat, d'ye see? There's to be no—"

He broke off as the door of Captain Osmond's cabin reopened. The skipper handed a flat bundle to Dockery.

"Get that bent, if you please, and ready to hoist in the morning," he said, and retired again. The mate turned the parcel over and over in his fingers and finally cut the string and opened it. It was a large red flag, like that at present decorating the cruiser.

Again the mate's eye sought and found the engineer's, and for a long moment they stared at one another across the crimson folds. Then Dockery shrugged and began to laugh unrestrainedly.

"Well, damn me—" he said, still shaking. There was the sudden sound of oars in the darkness overside, and a voice hailed.

"Tantallon, ahoy!"

Dockery snapped abruptly back into seriousness, and answered it.

Another voice spoke.

"British consul speaking. Is Captain Osmond aboard?"

Dockery went to the rail.

"He's here, sir," he said. "In his cabin."

Some kind of a conference appeared to be taking place down there in the darkness.

After a minute the consul spoke again.

"I'd like to come up and see him, I think!" he said in a curiously throttled tone. "Yes, we'll see Captain Osmond!"

A soft step came up behind Dockery, and a softer voice spoke over his shoulder.

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the Tantallon's skipper. "Come up, gentlemen —come up, if you please."

THE consul mounted the ladder, and the big, hairy Captain Copeland was at his heels. They were both of them in a state of ill-suppressed emotion, and the consul let fly as soon as his foot was on the deck.

"L-look here, sir!" he began. "What's all this I hear about you marching round the streets with a—with a revolutionary cockade up? Why, damme"—his eyes goggled at Osmond under the electrics—"you've got the blasted thing on now! What d'ye mean by it, eh?"

Captain Osmond opened his mouth to make pacific reply, but the official swept on breathlessly.

"Hell and blazes, sir!" he stormed. "D'ye know what you've been doing? Taking sides in these damn spig squabbles—openly! Great Cæsar's ghost, man, there'll be an international stink

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about this. You're liable to be jugged, anyway—and if the loyalists do get into power again, you'll be shot, as sure as eggs. And I'll be in the same mess, too, confound you, for not stopping the tomfoolery. What d'ye mean by it, eh?"

"Oh, I shouldn't worry about that, sir. After all, there's nothing to be alarmed about. Merely a little—er—amateur diplomacy, that's all. And I'm sailing for San Tomas in the morning, just as I said I was."

Captain Copeland choked with fury. "There you are!" he said to the consul. "What did I tell you? He's been colloguin' with these damn spiggoties—and he'll get to San Tomas yet and snaffle all the cargo in sight, while we stay here and rot! Oh, yes, that's his little game!"

The consul threw up his hands.

"Crazy!" he ejaculated. "Sheer, crazy lunacy! You'll get sunk by their batteries in San Tomas if you show your nose there. They've already fired on four or five ships trying to get in!"

"But they won't fire on me," said Captain Osmond sweetly. "Oh, no—they won't fire on me, sir!"

Again the consul waved impotent fists. "How the devil d'you know they won't fire on you?" he demanded. "Of course they'll fire on you. They'll blow you out of the water, I tell you. No, no—you're not going to San Tomas—I'll not let you!"

Captain Osmond blinked. "I don't exactly see how you'll stop me, sir," he suggested with a touch of firmness for once. "I've got your signature to my papers here, you'll remember—"

The consul stared at him with eyes round as saucers. "You—you—you—" was all he found to say, but Captain Copeland took up the running.

"Yes," he said furiously. "And d'you know what the end of it all'll be? You'll have the lot of us jugged—sunk as like as not—for belonging to the same nationality as you are. That's what you're letting us in for, you silly old coot!"

Captain Osmond laughed good-humoredly. "Oh, come, come, captain!" he said. "Not as bad as all that, surely? You're just a little upset, I'm afraid—perhaps it's that gambling affair. Well, well—out of evil cometh good, and it may teach you a lesson, after all!"

Captain Copeland almost foamed at the mouth for a moment. Then he shook his fist in Osmond's face.

"All right for you!" he said hoarsely. "I know your little game, mister! I've got you sized up all right. And I'll put a spoke in your wheel, as sure as I'm standing here on this deck. Oh, by James, yes! I'll fix you—damn skrim-shanking little pip-squeak!"

He turned on his heel and strode to the ladder, vanishing into the darkness in a thundercloud of wrath. After a moment's baffled muttering, the consul followed, leaving Captain Osmond in control of the situation. He turned to McRory, who had been listening with a reflective and malignant grin.

"Steam for six in the morning, if you please, Chief!" he said quietly. "And now I think I'll turn in!"

DAWN broke fresh and clear, and after a leisurely breakfast in the saloon Captain Osmond mounted to his bridge for the routine of another happy day.

He was more than ever benevolent and unassuming as he presided over the preparations being made for the Tantallon's run down coast. By no sign—save for the red rosette upon his breast—did he show any recollection of

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yesterday's swashbuckling. Dockery, reporting, found him leaning on the rail, looking towards the Almirante Balboa, and the freighter commanded by Captain Copeland. There was a half-smile on his face as he turned to the mate.

"A quaint sidelight on human nature over there, Mr. Dockery," he observed. "Captain Copeland, doing a little visiting!"

It was so. Through the glasses Dockery saw the big skipper seated in the stern of a boat, being pulled rapidly towards the cruiser's steel sides.

"What's his game, sir?" he asked. "I don't quite see—"

Captain Osmond chuckled. "I do," he said. "He's going across to—er, blow the gaff on us to them. Or try to. Yes—I rather thought that might happen, somehow."

He watched Copeland mount the ladder, and nodded. "Exactly!" he said meditatively. "Well, we shall see what we shall see. Captain Gomez there isn't just all they think he is. I'm afraid—I'm very much afraid our friend Copeland's due for a surprise!"

Dockery lowered the glasses and stared at him. "You—you mean to say, sir—" he began.

Captain Osmond beamed upon him with an air of quiet triumph. "I mean to say, Mr. Dockery," he said placidly, "that I rather warned Gomez he might find some of these other skippers—er, trying to pull his leg. Make a fool of him, if you get me. I impressed him, you might say, that he'd do very well to treat 'em with—hum, reserve." He chuckled again. "And I'd be rather interested to know," he continued dreamily, "just what Captain Gomez calls reserve—that's all!"

Dockery replaced the glasses with a hand that shook a little.

"I see, sir," he said faintly. "Yes—I see!"

Captain Osmond thrust his hands in his coat pockets. The infantile blue eyes were cloudless and unperturbed.

"You do, eh?" he queried thoughtfully. "I wonder, now—I wonder, Mr. Dockery!"

For half an hour or more nothing happened. Copeland's boat swung idly at the cruiser's gangway—the warship was, Dockery observed, now raising steam. The Tantallon, short on her anchor, exhaust a-flutter, rolled to the swell, awaiting her master's word for sailing. Captain Osmond, pacing his bridge, did not give it; his eye was still across the water.

At last there was movement—rapid, dramatic movement—on the Almirante Balboa's deck. A posse of men, distinguishable as rebels even from this distance, emerged hurriedly from a companionway, and hustled forward. In their midst was a shouting, gesticulating figure of protest. It vanished, while the boat's crew, standing erect, pawed at the steel plates and also raised frenzied shouts of alarm to high heaven. Someone leaned overside and deftly cut their painter; someone else decanted a bucket full of galley slops and trimmings on to their heads. Simultaneously the cruiser's winches began to clank and the chain crept in link by link through her hawse.

Captain Osmond snapped the binoculars shut with an air of finality.

"Up anchor, Mr. Dockery!" he said. "We'll go!"

BLOOD-RED ensign at the fore, her engines turning over slowly, the Tantallon picked her way into the deserted anchorage of Sam Tomas.

The town lay on the flanks of a gigantic saucer, as it were an old vol-

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canic crater, one side of it sliced open to the sea, the others sloping up and back into the bulk of a great brown mountain. On each horn of the bay's three-quarter-mile circle lay an antiquated fort, with the round mouths of equally ancient muzzle-loaders peering from embrasures. Crimson flags were again much in evidence, both on the forts and in the town; but from the summit of a large building, gloomily impressive among the narrow streets and ramshackle dwellings, floated defiantly the red-white-and-green ensign of the old government.

Captain Osmond regarded it with interest.

"Ah?" he said. "They're still making a fight of it, eh? Gomez there," he jerked a finger at the cruiser, "seemed to think they'd have knuckled under long ago. He told me so, in fact. Well, he was wrong, it seems—it's surprising how very wrong that man is now and again!"

The Almirante Balboa had crept into the mouth of the bay, and lay there, silent and menacing, within musket-shot of the forts. A single discharge of her excellent, brand-new six inch guns would reduce their venerable armament to scrap-iron; and her secondary quick-firers would make a pretty mess of San Tomas city and all that was in it in rather less than twenty minutes, by all appearances.

Captain Osmond mused. "I wonder," he said to Dockery and the engineer, "I wonder how our friend Copeland's managing. Maybe he's getting it brought home to him that it isn't wise to stick your nose into other people's affairs—unless you're quite sure who the other people are!"

He turned to the engineer, who had been considering the warship with a stubbornly malignant scowl.

"Mr. McRory," he said quietly, "a word with you!"

He drew the Scot aside, and for some minutes spoke to him in an undertone. McRory's lean, gloomy features gradually illuminated themselves in a kind of astonished, gratified glow. He nodded, finally.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he said, and rubbed his horny hands one against the other. "I'm wi' ye—I comprehend pairfectly! Ou, aye—pairfectly!"

He turned away, still shaking hands with himself. Stroud, the second, addressed the skipper.

"Here's a boat coming from shore, sir," he reported.

In fact, one was approaching, with a large individual in the stern-sheets—a very fat man in untidy uniform, with a broad sash of the inevitable hue girt cummerbund-fashion about his middle. Captain Osmond inspected him with composure.

"Yes," he said. "This'll be Avilar, of course—the leader in this funny revolution of theirs. Gomez was going to wireless him about us—the glad tidings of great joy—and this is an official welcome, I've no doubt. Stand by, gentlemen, if you please!"

HE enjoinder was a necessary one, for General Avilar proved to be an entire entertainment in himself. Where Gomez was scrawny and virulent, he possessed a tragic frown and a well-developed sense of the melodramatic. He paused an instant at the head of the gangway, struck an attitude, and forthwith fell upon the neck of the scandalized Captain Osmond.

"*Señor—señor!*" he warbled. "But it is of the 'appiness! The Capitan Gomez, she tell me-- You are of us, no?"

The Tantallon's master extricated

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himself with difficulty, and acknowledged the welcome in his excellent Spanish, so that the General beamed.

"The pleasure, it is to us!" he proclaimed. "This town, she are yours, *señores!* You wish anything—pooh, you shall 'ave it! I, Avilar, 'ave spoke!"

He gesticulated expressively, and almost abolished a man who had just followed him on the freighter's deck. It was Gomez, who had arrived from the cruiser unobserved, with a detail of his officers. The entire party bore evident traces of yesterday's revelry, but they were full of effusive good nature, and the greeting between Gomez and Avilar was a masterpiece of Latin bonhomie. While it was in progress, Captain Osmond eyed the crowded wharves of the port.

"There's enough stuff there to load us half a dozen times over," he said aside to Dockery.

The mate grinned. "Looks that way, sir," he agreed. "What a score-off it's going to be for the others. Wonder how Copeland'll like it—"

Captain Osmond smiled once more, a trifle wintrily. "I wonder, too!" he observed. "Yes, I'd like to know that, very much."

There was another interruption, from Avilar this time, a perfect torrent of Spanish. The skipper listened, and turned to his associates.

"One moment, gentlemen, please," he said. "I rather fancied this might happen. We're invited ashore—guests of the revolution, and so on. I don't need to tell you to—er, behave with dignity, I'm sure. Whatever you do, don't offend these fellows. There's too much at stake, just now."

He fired a train of sonorous phrases at Avilar, and amid much bowing and grinning the party moved to the gangway. At a glance from the skipper, McRory fell back; but his eye was upon Gomez, and it followed him along after he was in the boat and being rowed across the glassy harbor in the evening light.

"Mphm, aye!" said Mr. McRory, and departed about his own business.

REBEL hospitality in Sam Tomas was something to be remembered.

The two mates, strive as they would, found it a well-nigh superhuman task to preserve the dignity enjoined upon them by the skipper. The entire revolutionary party seemed set on filling their new adherents with liquids of greater or less potency, and they were conducted from one haunt to another under escort of cheering, vociferous crowds.

"'Strewth!" Dockery muttered, after the sixth or seventh visit. "If this goes on, we'll be blithero by midnight—"

"Better not!" said Stroud grimly. "You heard what Osmond said. I don't see myself getting across that little biter, somehow. I don't fancy he's what he seems, by a long way!"

The captain had been swept away by Gomez and Avilar to some private retreat, and for hours the mates had not set eyes on him. Dockery grunted.

"Shouldn't be altogether surprised if you weren't right, at that," he agreed. "Hey — Good godfathers, what's all that?"

From somewhere near at hand came the sudden tearing rattle of musketry, and the paralyzing crash of high explosive. Up at the beleaguered citadel the loyalists were still holding out, stubbornly and with a kind of hopeless desperation. The revellers surrounding the mates merely yelled derisively at the sounds; others were attending

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to the siege, and anyhow there was more serious business in hand. They plunged into another *cantina,* dragging Dockery and Stroud with them.

"Amen!" said Dockery resignedly. "Call me when it's all over!"

Nevertheless, at around four in the morning, Mr. Dockery found himself —still approximately sober—walking deviously down a street towards the harbor.

The tumult had died down to a mutter, and finally away altogether. Here and there a reveller, overcome, sprawled snoring in the gutter, and from the citadel up the hill there still came the occasional shot and chorus of faint cries. But otherwise Sam Tomas was dark and slumberous, banking up for the tremendous head that seemed likely to be its portion by the light of noon.

Dockery's own head was spinning and buzzing oddly, and his course down the street was scarcely a compass one. However, he could still navigate, and with some hazy notion of returning sooner or later to the Tantallon, he was heading for the water, whose pale glimmer he could see at the foot of the slope before him.

A figure came lurching out of a side-alley, caromed off a post, and fell into his arms. For an instant they grappled, and then the mate swore, recognizing Stroud.

"Oh—it's you!" he said thickly. "Well, an' where've you come from, young feller? An' where—where's the skipper?"

Stroud surveyed him with a glassy eye. "I dunno," he said, fumbling with his hands much in the manner of one exploring his pockets. "I ain't got him!"

Dockery grasped him by the arm. "C'm'on!" he hiccuped magnificently. "Damn the skipper, anyway! Le's go home to bed!"

Someone tapped him on the shoulder, and he whirled about. It was Captain Osmond, incredibly sprung from nowhere—prim, precise, and unmoved as ever.

"Come with me!" he said, beckoning.

STUPIDLY, and with Stroud in tow, Dockery followed. The Tantallon's master led the way smartly to a large house that faced the quayside. There were lights in it still, but no soul was visible as they entered. The *patio* was deserted, save for a tinkling fountain whose melody was almost drowned out by the reverberations of mighty snoring somewhere close at hand.

"This way!" said the skipper and pushed a door open.

The two mates blinked at the scene before them. At a table in a richly furnished room, a litter of bottles all about them, sat—or rather slumped—Avilar and Gomez. They were both of them fathoms deep in a torpor that even the Tantallonites' unceremonious entry failed to stir.

Captain Osmond pointed to them. "Pick 'em up, gentlemen, if you please!" he said. "One at a time—and then follow me!"

Bemusedly, Dockery laid hands on Avilar. Then something seemed to strike him, and he tested the limp arms in a puzzled fashion.

"Hocussed, by thunder!' he ejaculated suddenly.

Captain Osmond nodded. "Laudanum," he said without batting an eyelash. "Take hold and heave, if you please!"

Still moving as in a dream, the mates obeyed. Like a couple of insensate

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lumps of clay, the revolution's leader and his admiral were swiftly raised and as swiftly carted into the dim morning. The skipper led the way briskly; he moved across the cobbled quay, and peered down over its edge. The Tantallon's No. 2 boat lay close to the stone, a dim shape in the darkness.

"Lower away!" commanded Osmond. "And then get the other one."

He dropped to the tiller himself, and waited placidly until Gomez had joined Avilar on the floorboards. By no slightest alteration in voice or manner did he indicate where and how he had spent his night. He was cool as a cucumber, unruffled as the harbor waters themselves.

"Give way, men!" he said. "And put your backs into it!"

The boat shot from the quay. Dockery and Stroud, sobered from sheer bewilderment, stared at each other in the dusk. They said nothing—there was nothing to say. Once more they had the impression of moving in atmospheres too rarefied for them, in dimensions beyond their understanding.

Then Dockery stirred. "Port a little, sir!" he whispered to the skipper. "We'll overshoot her, this way—"

Captain Osmond held his course in silence for a moment.

"No talking, if you please!" he said—and Dockery collapsed, for he had just recognized whither they were heading. The Almirante Balboa's great bulk lay dead ahead of them. There were dark figures moving on her decks.

"In oars—way enough!" said the skipper, and deftly twirled the boat to her side. A head protruded over the rail. "That you, Mr. McRory?"

"Aye!" said the engineer. "All's correct here — the billies were a' sleepin', whut wasn't ashore at the party. A wheen puir bodies, these dagoes, sir. She's ours this minute!"

CAPTAIN OSMOND mounted to the deck and glanced about him.

"Very well," he said composedly. "Sling these two up from the boat, and lock 'em below somewhere. Keep 'em there till I tell you. And if that's Captain Copeland creating all the rumpus, let him loose and tell him I'll be glad to see him."

There was a muffled thumping from somewhere in the cruiser's bowels, punctuated by infuriated bellowings. McRory departed, a grin on his face, and in due course Copeland appeared. Captain Osmond was standing with the mates by the four-inch gun amidships. He was just concluding careful instructions to Dockery.

"Got all that?" he said. "Then stand by a moment, if you please. Ah, captain—good morning! Glad to see you're all right, after all. Now, if you'll come with me, there's a little job of work here I'd like your assistance with!"

Captain Copeland looked wildly about him, at the cruiser's decks, empty in the growing light of dawn, at San Tomas across the water, and at the baby-faced little man sitting astride the trail of a quick-firer.

"I—I-- But I don't understand!" he stuttered weakly.

Captain Osmond smiled again. "I dare say not!" he said. "But get in here with me, and you soon will, captain. All right, Mr. Dockery—let her go!"

Bang!

The roar of the four-inch split the morning, and the shell, striking fair on the stonework of the quay, exploded with a crash that shook San Tomas in

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its drunken slumbers, and made weary, battle-stained men up in the citadel rub gummy eyes and babble excitedly of miracles. Captain Osmond peered through his sights.

"Here goes!" he murmured, and pressed trigger.

IN the bright noon-day, quiet at last hung over San Tomas. In its streets the sporadic firing had died away, and only little drifts and whorls of smoke showed where desultory blazes smouldered still.

Upon the Almirante Balboa's deck a lean and fiery-eyed man—black as a tinker with smoke and sweat, rocking with fatigue—faced Captain Osmond. He was almost incoherent with gratitude, although, unlike Avilar, he did not indulge in dramatics. He simply pointed at the town.

"*Señor,*" he said huskily, "it is yours—all yours. Take what you will—do what you wish! My government she are—she are some'ow—'ow do you say—upset, topside-down. But she recover now, *muchas gracias* to you, *señor,* and she do not forget. There is a further ceremony, some day, of the thanks—but for now . . ." He waved his grimed hand again with a gesture of finality, and Osmond blushed.

"Much obliged, I'm sure!" he said. "There's a beautiful lot of ore there, I see, already bagged. Mr. Dockery!"

"Sir?" said the mate.

"Get our boat away, if you please. We'll leave these gentlemen to pick up the pieces now, I think. You'd better see to getting the Tantallon warped in at once, and we'll—ahem, snake out the best of what's here while the going's good. Jump lively, please, Mr. Dockery!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The mate moved off, and Osmond turned to Captain Copeland.

"And now," he said equably, "let's see—wasn't there a little matter between us, captain? Three months' pay, I believe? Well, if you'll allow me, I'll give you a cast back to Concepcion, and we'll adjust matters with the consul there. Ahem—I dislike rubbing it in, captain—but wasn't there another something? What was it you called me in that consul's office there?"

Before either he or Copeland could speak there was a sudden uproar from forward—thumps, yells, and a harsh Scot's voice addressing someone in the untrammeled idiom of the Clyde. Another instant and Gomez flashed into view, running frenziedly before McRory, who pursued him with giant strides. Down the deck they pelted, and away aft, where a final despairing shriek and a bellow of triumph from the Scot proclaimed the end of the chase. Captain Osmond's mouth twitched a little at the sounds of mayhem being committed.

"Yes," he said slowly. "White-haired boy, wasn't it, captain? Well, the next time you tackle one of them, my friend, I'd be inclined be—ahem, pretty damn-well certain he's what you think he is. Otherwise you'll be getting yourself into serious trouble, like that gentleman there. D'you agree?"

Without waiting for an answer he disappeared over the side, leaving Copeland gaping after him. From aft McRory appeared, in time to catch his last words. He was rubbing his hands reflectively, and he caught the loyalist commander's eye with a most dissolute and familiar wink.

"Mphm, aye!" he observed, as if to the world in general. "Mphm, aye!"

THE END

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Nita Chine's face went white

The Gold Fist

By GEORGE F. WORTS

There must be, Bill Lassiter decided, some other way to save his $15,000,000 inheritance than by marrying a girl he didn't love

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Bill Lassiter inherited $15,000,000 from his uncle, he bet it all against the $2,000,000 inherited by Ladorna Whipple, his late uncle's secretary, that he could, without funds, make $50,000 inside of a year.

The year was nearly up and Bill was penniless in Peru when he came into possession of a mysterious gold fist which contained an ancient scientific formula of untold value.

John B. Grayson, of New York, had offered Bill $100,000 if Bill could bring him the fist and the quipu, or knotted thread, which held the code to the secret.

Bill headed back for New York on a small steamer. On the ship he met several questionable characters, including Ramon Amador, a Bolivian political refugee, Victor Chine, a man of seemingly hypnotic power, and his wife, Nita.

They all seemed determined to get the gold fist.

Bill also met Joanna Trowbridge, a New York society girl, and fell in love with her. She also wanted the gold fist, because her family fortunes had disappeared during the depression.

Arriving in New York, Bill gave the quipu to Dr. Bruce Orwood to decipher. Before Orwood could complete his work he was murdered. A startling fact developed about Bill's cousin, Homer Lassiter, a scientist.

Homer discovered that he could tell when people were doomed to die soon. When their lives were in great danger, their faces appeared totally blank to him.

This story began in the Argosy for August 31

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CHAPTER XII.

"MARRY HER!"

A LARGE crowd of men was assembled on the sidewalk in front of the tall building when Bill Lassiter's taxicab delivered him home. They were reporters and newspaper photographers.

As he stepped out of the cab, flashbulbs flashed and shutters clicked.

Voices shot questions at him.

"How're ya making it, Bill?"

"Are you gonna win that bet, Bill?"

"Are you marrying the Whipple dame?"

"There's nothing new," Bill said. "And I'm in a hell of a rush."

"How about this Whipple dame?"

"What about her?" Bill asked.

"She laughed hysterically when we asked her if you had any chance of winning that bet. What's there in the rumor that you're going to marry her?"

"She just laughed," another said.

"No, she didn't," someone denied. "She said she wouldn't have Bill if he was the last man on earth."

"She called you an out-and-out Red, Bill," a woman reporter put in. "Because you're such a total liability!"

"What's this we hear about a gold fist?"

"It's just another rumor," Bill said.

He fought his way through and took the elevator. Withers, his butler, let him in. He looked anxiously at Bill's haggard face.

"Any luck, sir?"

"Plenty—but the wrong kind. Put a couple of footmen to work calling up every hotel in New York until they locate Ramon Amador. He may try to reach me. I must get in touch with him."

"Yes, sir. Mr. McClurg is waiting for you in your study. A Mrs. Chine called and said she would be here at about seven, and wants to see you urgently. And Mrs. Dearwester phoned to tell you that the Happy Hundred are rooting for you. I believe every one but this Whipple person is rooting for you, sir. The telephone has been ringing steadily for hours."

That last message left Bill feeling a little empty and chilled. So many people were rooting for him, so many people were depending on him to win that bet.

He went through the billiard room and the music room and up a flight of stairs into his study. His lawyer was waiting there—big, red-faced, gray-haired Mike McClurg, smoking one of his villainous black cigars. He was standing at a window, looking down on and across the garden—the flower garden off the great drawing room, a garden now fragrant with roses in bloom. It was one of the largest and most magnificent skyscraper gardens in the city.

Mike McClurg looked sad. When he was sad, he looked like a mastiff.

"Well, Bill," he said, "it's going to be a shame to lose all this. You've got the nicest spot in New York."

"Maybe I won't lose it," Bill answered.

Mike stared at him and slowly puffed his cigar. "Why didn't you come to my office?"

"Too busy."

"Yes. I know. The gold fist. I've heard about the gold fist. Let's see it."

Bill showed it to him. In Mike McClurg's stubby, practical hands the fist lost its glamor, its romance, its mystery. It became merely a lump, or a shell, of antique gold.

"Do you know what it's all about?" Mike asked.

"Not yet."

"Then why in hell are you wasting your time with it? It's the bunk, Bill. Tell me about it."

BILL told him about it. He gave him the history of the fist. Mike was unimpressed. Even the death of Dr. Orwood failed to impress him.

"It's the bunk, Bill," he repeated. "It's a wild goose chase. You've gone haywire. Forget this piece of junk. Become practical. You've got six hours until midnight. What are you going to do about it?"

Mike tossed the gold fist scornfully to Bill.

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"What about all these people who are looking to you to help them?" the lawyer went on. "What about these servants who've been so faithful? What about your cousin Homer? What about the Happy Hundred? What about the experimental farm? What about the scholarships in the State Universities?"

"Good Lord, Mike, are there more people depending on me?"

"Haven't you heard about the scholarships?"

"Nope."

"Your uncle established them in half the State Universities in the country—to help hard-working, deserving young fellows get an education in these hard times. It's only seventy-five thousand a year, but in these days that's a big help to bright, worthwhile young men."

Bill said, "What's this experimental farm?"

"A marvelous experiment your uncle was having conducted in Maryland. It's a sort of proving ground for agricultural school graduates. It's been a wonderful help to a lot of fine young fellows, and it's been a big help to the farmer. They've made some important discoveries there, Bill, about crops and soil and that sort of thing. Didn't your uncle ever tell you about it?"

"Damn it, why didn't Uncle Ben provide for all these things in his will?"

"Because he depended on you. You see, Bill, you look like the dependable sort. Your Uncle Ben didn't guess—and I didn't guess—that when the time came, you'd prove to be so futile. Well, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to waste more good time playing hide-and-go-seek with that fist, or are you going to get busy?"

"Doing what?"

"Bill," the lawyer said thinly, "you're exhausting my patience. I guess you're nothing but a damn fool."

"Wait a minute," Bill said grimly. "Those are fighting words, Mike."

"Good!" Mike said. "Get up and fight!"

"What's your bright idea?"

Mike McClurg took a fresh grip with his strong white teeth on the butt of his cigar. He rubbed his hands together fiercely.

"I'm going to give you something you've never accepted from me in your life—some good advice. You haven't time to think it over. You've time only to act. Marry Whipple."

Bill gazed at him with one eyebrow raised.

"Listen," said Mike heavily, "I'm not kidding. It's your only chance. Underneath, that girl is nuts about you. She always has been nuts about you. She pretends to be scornful. Actually, she worships the ground you walk on. She adores you. You are her hero, her ideal. Have you got it? She is nuts about you."

"But I'm not nuts about her."

"Oh, my God. Listen to you. With the ruins of a fifteen-million-dollar estate crashing about your ears, you say, 'I'm not nuts about her.' Who cares? Think what's at stake! Look at it this way. You're like a king about to topple from his throne. All your subjects look to you to protect them. Many kings have married women they weren't nuts about—but it saved the kingdom."

MIKE McCLURG threw his cigar away and fired up another. Puffing savagely, he went on:

"You can drive to Greenwich and be married long, long before midnight. What you do with her after you marry her makes no difference. What do kings do? Never mind. The point is—marry her!"

"Oh, hell, Mike. If I don't win that bet, she'll have the entire fifteen million. She is as hard as flint. She has an ice cube for a heart. You know how smart she is. What chance would I have, married to her, trying to beg or bully her into carrying on these ideas of Uncle Ben's?"

"You haven't got the idea," Mike answered. "Your marriage to her will ball up that fool agreement so thoroughly that no court in the world will hear her case.

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It's the only way to save your uncle's fortune."

"No, it isn't," Bill said.

The phone rang. Bill answered it. The night switchboard girl said, "A Mr. Ramon Amador is registered at the Hotel McElvin, Mr. Lassiter—Room 2428."

"Have you got him?"

"No, sir. I've been trying. The hotel says he left word not to be disturbed."

"If he calls, tell him I'm on the way down. Mike, stick around. Don't forget you're refereeing this."

"What?" Mike asked. "The death struggles of a fine old family fortune?"

"I'm not licked yet," Bill said, and went out. He left the apartment building by a back way, to avoid reporters, and took a taxicab to the Hotel McElvin. A desk clerk told him that Mr. Amador might or might not be in his room, but that he had left word that he was in to no one.

Bill took an elevator to the twenty-fourth floor, went to Room 2428 and knocked. There was no answer. He walked down to the end of the hall and looked out over the misted lights of the city. He went to the other end of the hall and opened a door over which a red exit light was burning. It gave upon a stairway and a window. Beyond the window he saw the steel lattice-work of a fire escape.

Bill opened the window and climbed out on the fire escape platform. He walked along it, counting rooms as he went. He saw people dressing for dinner. A half-clad red-headed girl saw him and shrieked. If he didn't get off the fire-escape platform in a moment he would have house detectives to deal with.

The window of Room 2428 was closed and the shade was drawn. A light was burning beyond it. Bill placed his ear to it and listened. He heard nothing within. He tried the window gingerly and found that it was unlocked, but he did not raise it immediately. He knew that a man like Ramon Amador would unhesitatingly shoot any man appearing unexpectedly through his window.

He hesitated, then rapped sharply on the pane. There was no answer, and, though he put his ear to the small crack under the window, he heard no sound.

He opened the window, started to swing one leg over the sill, then checked himself.

RAMON AMADOR was lying on the floor a few feet from the hall door. He looked as if he were dead. He was on his back. His eyes were closed and his face, ordinarily so dark, was a curious lemonish-blue.

Bill went in, closed the window, saw that the shade was all the way down, and kneeled beside the Bolivian. Ramon Amador was not dead. He was unconscious. A small trickle of blood was running down from a bruise on his left temple, where he had evidently been struck recently. He was breathing in long, rattling gulps.

Bill quickly removed most of his clothing and searched him. Then he swiftly searched the room. He did not find the quipu. The quipu was gone. It had been here, he was certain, but he was just a little too late. Amador had certainly killed—or had ordered the killing of—Dr. Orwood, to secure the quipu, and someone else had all but killed him in securing it!

Bill hesitated for a moment, thinking. Then he let himself into the hall and took an elevator to the lobby. There, on his way to the street, he received another shock. Moving rapidly through the lobby, he saw Ladorna Whipple.

He recognized that lovely slim little blonde instantly. He would always know her by the arrogant way she carried her beautiful head. She had just come down the stairs from the mezzanine, and there was a grim look about her mouth. Her eyes were dilated with excitement, and she was very pale.

Was she involved in the search for the fist and quipu? Did she, Bill wondered, have the quipu? It was a startling, a shocking suspicion to entertain. The rumor of the gold fist had spread swiftly. It would, of course, be only natural for her to work with his enemies, to make every

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attempt to prevent him from selling the gold fist, the quipu and their explanation to John Grayson before midnight. But how had she become involved—and with whom?

His hesitation lost her. She disappeared into a revolving door, and, when he reached the street, she was gone. He ran to the curb and looked about for her, but he saw her in neither direction.

Newsboys were shouting, "Huxtra! Huxtra!" A boy thrust a peach-colored newspaper at him. Bill glanced at the headline.

PLANE CRASH FORESEEN
BY "DEATH DETECTOR"!

Under it was the photograph of a familiar face. Homer!

Bill bought the paper and glanced down the banks of black type. He gathered that Homer had been taken to Bellevue on suspicion of insanity, and was baffling the entire medical staff with a phenomenal gift of predicting death by what he saw in men's faces.

Bill jumped into a taxicab and yelled, "Bellevue! Step on it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BILL'S FACE.

REACHING Bellevue, he found the psychopathic ward, asked to see his cousin, and was taken into a large white room filled with men and women in white and other men and women—Bill recognized these latter as reporters—and was in time to be almost blinded by flashing flashlight bulbs.

He saw Homer in the center of this small mob, and it was a Homer he hardly recognized. Homer was, ordinarily, a mild and meek little man, but this old personality had evidently been cast aside and a new one assumed; for Homer was talking rapidly and with assurance to the pressing group. His face was happily flushed, and his eyes were sparkling with the excitement of all this attention. Definitely, Homer Lassiter had become a man of the hour, and was intoxicated with the fun he was having.

As Bill started toward him, a startling thing happened. Homer suddenly shouted: "There's another one, gentlemen! There's a man with an utterly blank face! I can see his hair and his clothing, but his face is a total blank."

A reporter whom Bill recognized said, "You must be mistaken, Homer. That's your cousin. That's Bet-A-Billion Bill!"

Bill now became the center of attention. Doctors and nurses and women turned and looked at the notorious playboy.

"Bill!" Homer shouted. "Your face is blank! Bill! I can't see your face! Come over here!"

Bill felt a chill go through him, such a chill as men may experience when someone walks over their grave—a chill that started nowhere and momentarily possessed every fibre of him.

He said, "What is this all about, Homer?"

Many voices attempted to explain. Bill gathered that Homer had not only foreseen death in the faces of a planeload of passengers, and had been correct, down to the lone survivor, but that he had since been taken through the wards of Bellevue and had specified the chances of life and death for upwards of eighty cases—upholding the doctors' diagnoses in almost all instances; and in one astonishing case, insisting that a man's face was blank and thereby sending the man post haste to an operating room where his life had been saved by inches—a man whom the doctors had declared was on the mend.

It was all pretty confusing, and through it all Homer kept insisting that Bill's face was as blank as a new blotter.

"All I can see of it, Bill, is a brown blur—a sort of dark mahogany brown, which is your sunburn shining through a sort of milky mist. Something is about to happen to you, Bill. You're in great danger."

Once again, despite his unwillingness to

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believe in this strange new gift, Bill felt a premonitory shiver run through his big frame.

"You'd better have your heart examined, Billion," one of the reporters laughed. "This cousin of yours always picks the losers to lose—and he wins every time!"

A doctor had snatched up Bill's wrist and was feeling his pulse. A stethoscope appeared. Another doctor listened to Bill's heart, and pronounced that, though it was beating rapidly with excitement, it was a heart that ought to be doing business at the same old stand eighty years from now.

"Do you feel all right, Bill?" Homer asked.

"Yes."

"Well, disaster is threatening you. You'd better—"

His words were blotted out by louder ones. "It's the damndest thing!" a doctor was saying. "There might possibly be a scientific explanation for—"

"Yes," another man took him up. "It's certainly curious. If it were just people who are about to die by natural causes, but when it's merely threatened death—a forthcoming accident—"

THE group was dividing itself between Bill and Homer, and Bill said, "Homer, I want to see you alone. Can it be arranged?"

Several voices said it could be arranged, and Homer and Bill were taken into a small consultation room, the door was shut, and they were alone.

Homer, flushed and breathing hard with happy excitement, looked into Bill's face with glittering eyes.

"Is my face still blank?" Bill asked.

"Yes!"

Bill took the gold fist out of his pocket and placed it on a desk. He moved back a half-dozen feet. "Now is it blank?"

"No!" Homer cried. "Bill! It's that thing that does it! It did it this morning. When that thing is in your possession—anywhere on your person—your face blanks out! Pick it up again. Do it slowly!"

Bill did it slowly. He reached out his hand and touched the gold fist. "There it goes!" Homer cried. "Your face began to go misty, and it just blanked out. As a matter of fact, Bill, your face isn't as clear as it ought to be. The outlines are a little blurred. Leave it there and go across the room."

Bill went across the room. Homer shook his head, as a physician might. "Still badly defined. You must be in great danger."

"I am. I know of at least four lives that have been lost over that fist."

"You're in great danger every moment it's in your possession."

Bill said grimly: "I can use you, Homer. You've given me a fifteen-million-dollar idea! Let's get out of here."

He repocketed that dangerous old piece of gold. "Come on, Homer."

But Homer was not anxious to go. He had been enjoying his little hour in the limelight; he had enjoyed the awed interest of the doctors and the sincere excitement he caused in the representatives of the press. It was the first time in his life he had merited such attention, and he wanted to enjoy it to the full.

"Bill, I really owe it to science to stay here."

"You can pay your debt to science tomorrow."

"But, what's this all about?"

"It's your chance to help me, Homer. It's your chance to get back on my payroll."

Bill was guiding him out of another door and down a hall. Once out of the hospital and in a taxicab, homeward bound, Bill said:

"Tell me something about this strange talent. How do the doctors account for it?"

"They don't—yet," Homer answered in a somewhat resentful voice. "At least, not to their satisfaction. You know, of course, I've been working with the wave fringe beyond each end of the spectrum—that is, invisible light ray—infra-red, ultra-violet and a hundred unnamed others."

"Yes," Bill said. "And they affected—"

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"That's right. They did something to my eyes—"

"Charged them with electricity?"

"Hardly that. The rays beyond the spectrum are queer things. Some unusual kind of power has been given to my eyes to foresee death. That's all. It will be explained some day. But what I can't understand, and what baffles all these doctors, is that I can foresee death when a man is *threatened by danger*. Death by natural causes might well send out warning vibrations that I see in the form of a blanked-out face. But death by accident—it's too baffling."

THE taxi swung into Park Avenue. "I hope," Bill said, "you don't lose the gift before midnight. Here's the dope: I am going to throw a party—a big one. Among those present will be, I believe, the person who has the quipu. That person will have a blank face."

"The what?"

"Quipu. The fringed cord that explains just what the scientific or engineering secret is that this fist holds!"

There was no time for further questions or objections, as the taxi had swung into the curb. Bill and Homer were promptly surrounded by reporters. There were more flashlights, more questions.

Reaching the penthouse, Bill asked Withers: "Any important phone calls?"

"No, sir. Hundreds of calls, but none of importance."

"None from Amador?"

"No, sir."

Bill looked at his watch. He said, "Withers, we have work to do. You've got to put on a party for me."

"Tonight, sir?"

"Yes. And a big party, Withers. A hundred and fifty guests. Get busy on it without delay. Hire all the caterers and other help you'll need. How is our credit?"

"It's still good, sir."

"There must be a good orchestra and some good entertainers. And we want some big people for guests. I'll give you the guest list in a moment. Who's in town?"

"Offhand, sir, there's Ambassador Jardine and Senator Woolson."

"Get them if you can. And get the mayor, the police commissioner and any celebrities you can round up. Just tell them I'm throwing a *good* party. They'll come. At least, they always have. And get a grade-A debutante and stagline list from Mrs. Eugene Ward. I want a hundred young guests. I want a lot of noise. The more noise and excitement the better. Try to get Rudy Whitman's orchestra, also Bing Astaire and Fred Crosby, and anyone else you can think of. And jot down this list. They must come. And I think they will. Ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Ladorna Whipple, Mike McClurg, Mr. and Mrs. Chine, and Ramon Amador. Get busy! Come along, Homer."

BILL went to his bedroom. He said to Homer, "Give me the names of a couple of archæologists as dependable, as honest as Bruce Orwood. And as good."

"There aren't any in New York just now," Homer answered. "They're scattered all over the world—Yucatan, Egypt, Mongolia. What's the matter with Bruce Orwood? Wouldn't he help you?"

"I'll explain it later."

Bill seated himself at the telephone and called, first, John B. Grayson, at the Century Club.

The president of Grayson and Clark said, "Well, Bill, can I write that check now?"

"Not yet, but you will before midnight. I'm giving a party, Mr. Grayson. It's a stunt, but you must come. A slightly bothersome point has come up. The man I hoped would solve the secret for me died rather suddenly. I want you to bring your own experts."

"Why, Bill?"

"Isn't it pretty obvious? The man I went to we could have trusted. But I don't know any others."

"What kind of experts do you want?"

"The finest engineer on your staff, and

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someone who knows something about archæology—someone who can translate quipus. Can you do it?"

"I think so. It may take some time."

"No later than ten, if possible, Mr. Grayson. And don't forget that checkbook."

He hung up.

"Bill," Homer blurted, "what's this about Bruce Orwood?"

"He was murdered."

"Because of this damned business?"

"Yes, Homer. I'll tell you all about it later."

"Who killed him?"

"I'm not sure, but I think he'll come to the party."

Bill signaled the switchboard girl and gave her Miss Joanna Trowbridge's number. The servant who answered insisted that Miss Trowbridge was not at home, but when Bill gave his name, Joanna's musical voice soon came on the wire.

Bill said: "Joanna! I'm throwing a party for a purpose. A nice big party, with Whitman's orchestra, and a nice flock of celebrities."

"I have a date," said Joanna.

"Break it. This is business."

"Business?"

"Our business. It's life or death, Joanna; it's sink or swim, and the devil take the hindmost. Slip into your prettiest frock and come as soon as you can."

"I warn you—" Joanna began.

"I know. Our war. That's what I want to discuss."

"It's a trick," Joanna said.

"But not on you, Joanna. I've forgiven you for yelling for that cop. I'm awfully big-hearted. Will you come early?"

"All right."

Bill hung up and said to Homer: "You'll find dress clothes in the blue guest room. Pick out some that fit you, yell for the valet, and be ready when the first guests arrive."

Bill placed the gold fist in his wall safe, closed the heavy door, and spun the dial to lock it. He turned from it as Withers came in.

"A lady who says her name is Mrs. Chine is here to see you, sir. She insists on seeing you. Shall I bring her up?"

"Yes. And, Withers. If anyone should phone and speak mysteriously—or come to the door, I'll see them at once. But be sure that my cousin is present. And no reporters are to be admitted. How is the party coming?"

"Bing Astaire is delighted to come. Fred Crosby sent his regrets, as did Senator Woolson. But Ambassador Jardine and the mayor are delighted to attend. And I have secured the Whitman orchestra. The police commissioner is not sure whether he will be able to come."

"Caterers? Champagne? Performers?"

"Yes, sir. Things are moving very smoothly, Mr. Lassiter. Our credit is still excellent."

"If I win this bet, Withers, I'm going to blow you to a six-months' trip to England."

"Thank you, sir. But I would prefer to stay right here with you. You might like to know, sir, that the servants have pawned everything they own and are betting even money with the reporter that you will win the bet."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTY BEGINS.

WAITING for Mrs. Chine, Bill was thoughtful. It seemed to him that half the people in New York were facing destitution if he didn't win that bet.

He lit a cigarette but crushed it out in a tray when Nita Chine came in. She had the air of a woman who has been weeping. Her large, gypsy eyes were misty, and her pretty mouth had a raw look.

She cried, "Oh, Bill! Bill!" She caught at his arms and stared up with a choked sob into his face.

"Bill, you've got to help me! I'm distracted. I don't know whom to turn to but you. He's threatened to kill me!"

"Who?" Bill asked.

"My husband! Victor! He swears I've

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betrayed him. He swears I had an affair with you on that ship."

"He must be crazy."

"Bill, he is. He's a madman. And he swears I've double crossed him. You've seen Joanna, of course. She's told you about that lie he forced me to tell you—bringing her here, telling everyone she was Sylvia Radkin and that she was insane—He insists you and I double crossed him! "

"How? " Bill asked calmly.

"I don't know! All I know is, he's a stark, staring madman, and threatening to kill me. Bill, you've got to do something. You've got to protect me! "

She swayed a little. Bill had a decidedly unpleasant sensation as he saw her eyes roll up into her head. Then Nita Chine pitched to the floor, unconscious.

Bill pressed a pearl button in the wall. A maid appeared. "The lady," Bill said, "has fainted. We'll take her into a bedroom and you can do what's necessary. Let me know when she wants to see me."

"Yes, sir."

Bill helped the maid carry the unconscious girl into the nearest bedroom, then he went to the blue room and found Homer in the act of tying a dress tie.

"Homer," Bill said, "you and I will constitute the receiving line. If I'm busy elsewhere, as I'm apt to be, you'll be a one-man receiving line. Your job is simply to stand near the door and watch them as they come in. When you see a blank face, let me know immediately."

Bill went downstairs and found Withers giving instructions to caterers. The penthouse was in a whirl of confusion, but it was orderly confusion. Bill's large staff of servants was trained to this sort of thing.

The maid to whose mercies he had consigned Mrs. Chine found him in the large drawing room, which was being prepared for dancing.

She said, "Mr. Lassiter, the lady seems to be much better. She came out of the faint, and is resting."

"Did she ask for me? "

"No, sir."

Bill went back upstairs. He went to the bedroom into which he had helped carry the unconscious young woman, and knocked on the closed door. When there was no answer, he turned the knob and looked in. The bed was empty. The room was empty.

SWIFTLY, Bill began a search for her. He found her in his bedroom, flattened against the wall, her head bent, an intense frown of concentration between her eyes, her hands gently manipulating the dial of his wall safe.

She looked up suddenly and saw him. Her face became pale, and her eyes narrow and hard.

"Oh," she said.

Bill took her gently by the arm and led her out of the room, and down the stairs to the front door.

Homer was lounging near by. "Is her face quite clear? " Bill asked.

"Yes. Perfectly clear."

"What is this? " Mrs. Chine snapped.

"Go home, Nita," Bill said gently, "and get dressed up. Put on your prettiest frock, come back, and try again."

Nita Chine gave him a queer, wild look, shook her arm free of his hand, and ran into the hall.

He called amiably, "Hurry! Or you'll miss the fun! "

Bill went back upstairs to dress. It was eight-thirty when he was finished. He tried not to be anxious. He had less than four hours in which to win that bet.

When Bill was ready, he picked up his room phone and told the switchboard girl to send Jake to him. Jake was Bill's head chauffeur. Jake was six feet two inches tall, and he had cauliflower ears and a turnip nose. He had once battered his way to within reaching distance of the heavyweight championship of the world. Retiring as an undefeated contender, because he had married a woman who objected to fighting, Jake Halloran had come into Bill's employ, and he kept himself in perfect condition.

To Jake, when he arrived, Bill said: "Jake, you're to stand by this wall safe.

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You are to protect it with your life. Got your automatic?"

"Yes, sir."

"If anybody tries rough stuff, use your own judgment. From now on, no one but me is to touch that wall safe."

"Yes, sir."

Bill went downstairs, looking a little tired from the exhausting events of the day, but also looking, with his tall, lean figure, his wide shoulders, his Peruvian sunburn, romantic, in a hard and interesting way.

So Joanna saw him as he reached the bottom of the stairs. She had just come, and she was radiant and lovely in a backless gown of sapphire velvet which clung lovingly to her slim and perfect figure. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright with excitement.

Advancing to meet her, Bill said, in an aside to Homer: "How about her?"

"She's mine!" Homer said fervently. "I saw her first."

"Don't be ridiculous, I own the woman. How about her face?"

"Clear as a bell! Wonderful!"

"Wait here. I'm taking her into the garden. Watch them as they come in. If you see a blank face, or if you see any face suddenly fade, let me know at once."

Bill went on to Joanna. And he wondered why it was that, under any conditions of lighting, any conditions of dress, any conditions whatever, she was always so romantic.

"We have something," he said, "of the greatest importance to discuss."

"You said life or death, Bill."

"I meant it. But not here. It's so stuffy in here. Let's go into the garden."

SHE gave him a dimpling smile and lightly took his arm. But he wasn't deceived. She was suspicious. She was on the alert for any form of trouble. She was clever. You didn't fool Joanna.

"That would be fun," she said softly.

"This is an armistice," Bill said.

"Really? I don't want an armistice. I said war and no quarter. I still mean it."

"I hope you're armed."

"I have a little automatic pistol."

"Don't mislay it."

Bill took her into the garden. It was probably the most romantic spot in New York. The air was sweet with the fragrance of roses. Somewhere in the darkness a fountain gurgled and splashed. There wasn't a moon, but the garden tonight was more romantic than if there had been. The mistiness of the air seemed to bring out the scent of the roses.

Bill took Joanna to a bench under a maple tree. It was sweet and dusky here.

"A girl," Joanna remarked, as they sat down, "could almost be swept off her feet in this atmosphere. Are you going to lose all this, Bill? All these fifty-six rooms and this lovely garden—everything?"

"It doesn't seem to make any difference any more," Bill answered. "Nothing seems to make any difference any more."

"We didn't come out here for that, Bill."

In the scented darkness, her face was a soft white oval.

"Perhaps not," Bill agreed, "but it's in the wind. Here's the situation, Joanna." And he told her frankly and fully just what the situation was. He told her about his visit to Amador's room, his glimpse of Ladorna Whipple in the McElvin lobby, of Homer's amazing second sight, or whatever it might be called.

Then Bill said, "The quipu is no good without the fist, and vice versa. I've got to contact the person who has the quipu. I strongly believe that person will try to contact me. Hence the party—to make things easy and pleasant and confused. But the person who has the quipu doesn't know about my ace in the hole—Homer. We have only about three hours, Joanna. I wanted you here because you're so clever. I want to call the war off. I can use you. If we win, you get a hundred thousand. If we don't, you'll still have a chance. Will you cooperate?"

"Yes," Joanna said.

"Shake."

They shook, and Bill did not let her hand go. He held onto it firmly and said, "Jo-

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anna, the other matter I wanted to discuss—"

"Not now!"

"Yes, now. Why not settle that, too?"

"It isn't that, Bill. You mean, win, lose, or draw, don't you?"

"Exactly! Even if we lose, we'll win. Poor as church mice, we'll get along. We're a pair of clever people. What if we'd be broke? Love is more important than a bank account."

"No, Bill," Joanna said firmly. "You've got to makek good. I'm willing to believe that love in a garret would be romantic—with you. But I'm a fighter, Bill. You've got to prove that you're no longer Bet-A-Billion Bill, the playboy. We'll win. Then we'll have another little talk. Here."

AN excited voice from the doorway said, "Bill! Bill! Where are you?"

It was Homer. "Bill, there's a blank face!"

"Man or woman?"

"Man! Come on!"

Bill followed him inside. Homer went from room to room anxiously scanning faces. He presently whispered: "There! That fellow over by the bar!"

During Bill's absence, many of his guests had arrived. Most of them were at the bar, the largest and most luxurious private bar in New York.

Bill and Homer moved closer. The man turned about with a glass of champagne in his hand.

"Yes," Homer whispered.

The man was Victor Chine. His face was pale. His hypnotic black eyes seemed to Bill to have red coals in their centers. But as Bill started toward him, there was a sudden influx of newcomers. They crowded about Bill. He saw the beautiful pink-and-white face of Ladorna Whipple. She wore a grass-green gown. It made her hair seem the purest of spun gold as the light struck it.

In the sudden milling about of thirsty people she was thrust close to Victor Chine. Then the crowd cleared a little and the man with the hypnotic eyes made his way, champagne glass in hand, toward Bill.

"I want very much," Chine said, "to talk to you, Mr. Lassiter. Is there somewhere we can go?"

"Follow me," Bill said.

He took his recent shipmate upstairs and into his study. As Bill started into the room, Chine slipped around behind him and closed the door and Bill found himself gazing into the muzzle of a small black automatic pistol.

"Mr. Lassiter," Chine panted, "I am a desperate man. You have the gold fist."

"And you," Bill said, "have the quipu."

"I don't know," the man with the pistol went on in a level voice, "how the fist came into your possession. But I will kill you, Mr. Lassiter, if you do not take me to where the fist is and deliver it to me immediately. I will count ten."

Bill gently waved a hand. "Don't count. I'll take you there. I never argue with a loaded gun."

He started for the door against which Victor Chine was backed.

"Wait a minute!" the black-eyed man snapped. "Where is the fist?"

"In my room—down the hall."

"We will go there side by side. And this gun will be in your side. If you make one false move, Mr. Lassiter, the gun will go off against your side."

BILL reached for the doorknob as Victor Chine turned. He turned the other way. For an instant the gun was not aimed at Bill. It was a momentary blind spot of which Bill took instant advantage. With his right hand on the knob, he brought up the other in a fist. He slugged the black-eyed man in the side of the jaw.

Victor Chine's head banged against the door. The pistol slid out of his hand. Bill caught it as it fell, and as Chine fell.

He grasped his lapels and dragged him to the center of the room. He methodically searched him. And when the pockets did not deliver the quipu, he swiftly disrobed him.

White-faced and glittery-eyed, Homer

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came in, stared at the half-dressed man on the floor and said: "He hasn't got it! His face is as clear as a bell!—It's the girl in green!"

"The dizzy blonde?"

"Yes! Her face went blank at the bar—before I could tell you. You were gone—with this fellow. She must have picked his pocket."

"Where is she?"

"Dancing."

They went downstairs.

"Stay with me this time," Bill said. He saw Ladorna in the arms of a young man from the stag line. "I'm going to cut in."

"We can't both dance with her," Homer protested.

"When I get her off the floor, follow me." To a footman passing, Bill said: "Oscar, go to my study. You'll find a sick man in there with half his clothes off. Help him get dressed and take him some brandy."

And to Homer: "Is her face still blank?"

"Yes, Bill."

Bill made his way among dancing couples, and tapped the shoulder of the young man with whom Ladorna was dancing. "May I cut?"

The young man stopped dancing, bowed, and Bill took Ladorna in his arms.

Ladorna was looking about her. Bill suspected that she was anxious to be danced with by someone else—almost anyone else.

"Bill," she said, "you're not going to win that bet."

"How much'll you bet?"

"What have you to bet with?" she laughed.

"I'll have fifteen million dollars by midnight."

"Your I. O. U.'s are no good at this bank, darling."

"It's stuffy in here," Bill said.

"I don't think so. I think this air-conditioning you've put in is marvelous."

"I want to show you something."

"But I don't want to see anything."

He had maneuvered her to the edge of the floor, where Homer was standing. He raised his eyebrows at Homer, and Homer nodded.

"Fall in," Bill said.

Bill had stopped dancing and had taken Ladorna firmly by one slim, white elbow.

"No," Ladorna said rather wildly.

"Scream," Bill said. "This is still my house."

HER face went white. She protested. She sent anguished glances about her, but no help came. With Homer behind her, Bill took her upstairs. The study door was open. Victor Chine was gone.

"This will do," Bill said.

The blond girl made one final effort to free herself of that vise-like grip.

"Her face still blank?" Bill asked.

"Still blank," Homer affirmed.

"Wait outside," Bill instructed him. "If I yell for help, call the reserves."

He pushed Ladorna into the room and closed the door. She sat down sulkily in a deep chair. She looked murderously angry.

"Gimme," Bill said.

"Give you what?" she snapped.

"The quipu."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"The little fringed cord that was inside the gold fist. You picked Chine's pocket at the bar."

"I still don't understand what you mean."

Bill sat down on the arm of a chair facing her and said, "Honey, you know I wouldn't hesitate to tear off every stitch of clothing you have on to find that quipu. I'm not so chivalrous as I was a year ago."

"I wonder."

"I could punch you in the jaw," Bill said thoughtfully.

"But you won't—"

"No," Bill agreed. "And threatening you with a gun wouldn't do much good."

"Of course not," she said blithely. "You could never shoot a woman."

"I have a better idea than that," Bill

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said. He went to the door and opened it a crack. Homer stood guard outside.

"Homer," Bill said, "get Miss Trowbridge. You know—the one in sapphire blue. Tell her to come here at once. Tell her it's urgent. Tell her there is little danger now of love in a garret. And tell her to bring her automatic."

BILL closed the door. Ladorna blew a smoke ring and said languidly, although her eyes were very alert, "What's this idea, Bill?"

"I'm helpless," Bill said. "I'm just too damned chivalrous. When I'm in a jam, I call an expert."

"Who?"

"Oh, you'll like her. With any kind of luck, I'm going to marry her."

Ladorna sat up. "You're going to let me out of this room instantly!"

The door opened and Joanna came in. She was pink with excitement.

"Shut the door," Bill said. "Got your gat?"

"Yes." It was in her hand—a small, ivory-handled automatic pistol.

"Joanna, this lovely little blonde has our quipu. May I present Miss Trowbridge? Miss Whipple. Joanna, I'm too chivalrous to take it away from her. I figured that women are never chivalrous with one another, so I sent for you. Would you hesitate to shoot her if she refused to hand over the quipu?"

"Not for an instant," Joanna answered crisply.

"I don't want her killed," Bill said hastily. "Merely maimed."

Joanna brought up her pistol in a hand that trembled a little at first, then steadied.

She said coolly, "I will shoot you through the right shoulder, Miss Whipple. Merely a superficial wound to begin with."

For a moment there was a head-on impact of two feminine wills. Ladorna was pale and her eyes were slits of blue. Joanna was paler. Her eyes were cold and without mercy.

But Ladorna's facial expressions were, of the two, the more arresting. Joanna was, in spite of the automatic, merely a determined girl. Ladorna was, unarmed, a potential murderess. Her lovely pink-and-white face had become an ugly mask of ice.

"The quipu, Miss Whipple," Joanna was saying steadily. "I intend to shoot at the count of three. One—"

"I haven't got it!" the blond girl panted. "Honestly, I haven't got it!"

"Two!"

"If you shoot me, I'll— Wait! Here it is!" Ladorna shrieked.

She plunged her hand into her bosom. She brought out the quipu.

Bill took it, glanced at it, and stuffed it into his inner vest pocket. "Ladorna," he said, "you can go now. But don't leave the party. Stick around. The night's young. I want you to help me celebrate. Show me you're a good sport and stick around."

Then he seized Joanna in his arms and spun her about the room. "Joanna, we've won! I've won the bet! I've got the fist and I've got the quipu!"

Ladorna went to the door and went out, casting a final black and somewhat mysterious glance at the two. She did not have the air of a defeated woman.

"We'll get the fist, and we'll deliver it to John Grayson," Bill said, almost incoherent now with the excitement of triumph. "It's hidden safely in the wall safe in my bedroom."

They went out and saw Ladorna running down the stairs. The orchestra was playing and a man's rich voice—it was Bing Astaire—was singing, "You're lovely to look at, delightful to know—"

Bill took Joanna by the arm and they walked down the hall to his bedroom door. The door was open, but they did not go in. They could only stare into the room.

Bill's pugilistic chauffeur was stretched out on the floor before the wall safe. His feet were wired together. His wrists were wired together. His mouth was pasted shut with adhesive tape. And the wall safe was open.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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"No you don't!" said Jim

Forest Ranger Jim Howard had one passion—to capture the head of Bighorn—then something altered the whole scheme of things

Bighorn

By

CHARLES NEWTON ELLIOTT

FROM where he sat on the high cliff above Roaring Fork, Ranger Jim Howard could look down on the trail which led into the land of Eagle River. The old ranger was so still, so intent, that he might have been chiseled out of a section of the granite cliff. He might have been absorbed in the far-flung panorama of mountains and valleys before him, or in the mass of wild roses which grew by the white water of Roaring Fork.

Actually, he was watching for someone, watching with a glint of grim purpose in his eyes. Bighorn's life was at stake, and to save it, Jim had determined to sell friendship, his job of nearly thirty years' standing with the Forest Service and his perfect record as an honest, trustworthy citizen of Malcomb County.

As he waited, Jim let his thoughts wander back over the past few years. Less than a decade ago, Eagle River had been

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primeval wilderness, broken only by a few trails and an occasional fire warden's cabin —an enormous forested basin, surrounded on all sides by the precipitous slopes of Eagle Range. The range itself was thrown up into a sweeping arc. Its forlorn peaks kept watch on almost two million acres of virgin forested land.

Eagle River Forest was the newest of the national forests. By transferring public domain—by purchase—over four million acres had been set aside; four million acres of dark spruce forests, rock pinnacles and barren ridges where the wind howled eternally and unmercifully. It comprised some of the wildest land in the Northwest, a land into which few humans had gone.

Appropriations were small and money scarce during those first lean years. With his two assistants, Jim had toiled day after day, blazing boundaries, surveying townships and sections, putting in markers. He had helped build lookout houses and cabins for his fire wardens; he had swung a pick with his men when they constructed trails through the passes and into the valleys.

Almost five years had passed since Jim had first seen Bighorn. Curly Henderson had given him that name. They had been on the north side of Eagle Peak, surveying a line across one of its dizzy slopes, when Curly caught at his arm.

"Great guns, Jim, look!"

A big mountain sheep stood on the cliff high above them, silhouetted against heavens that blazed with azure. He seemed out of all proportion to the ewes and smaller sheep about him. He was the most magnificent specimen Jim had ever seen.

"Bighorn!" whispered Curly. "The grand-daddy of all bighorns!"

They stood still and stared as the huge ram stepped off the rock, led his flock at a perilous angle up the cliff behind him and disappeared over the ragged skyline far above. Jim's voice might have held a quiver of excitement if the men with him could have believed their ears.

"Curly," he said, "I've seen lots of fine game heads in my life, but that is the first one I ever really wanted as a trophy."

IT was not until the following spring, however, that Jim had a chance to slip away for a few days and make another trip after Bighorn. He left his horse to graze in an open meadow near the base of Eagle Peak and, on foot, took the long, arduous trail up through the forested slopes to the rock-studded heights beyond. He climbed for almost a day before he reached bighorn country of wind-blown passes and barren, jagged granite above timberline. He searched along the northern edge of Eagle, eleven thousand feet above sea level, for three days, but was unable to find so much as a trace of Bighorn and his band.

Traveling in a saw-tooth country where no trees would grow, camping at night when the thermometer hung close to its zero mark and the wind bit into the flesh of his cheek, might have cooled the enthusiasm of a lesser man. But Jim Howard returned to his office with an even greater determination to collect the scalp of the splendid ram.

In the year that followed, Jim saw Bighorn on several occasions. Once when he was directing the activities of a fire crew in Elk Pass. Twice more when he was on the skyline beyond Eagle. The last two times he made an attempt to stalk the sheep, but by the time he circled cautiously to a point near them, the entire band had disappeared. Bighorn seemed to know, by the supernormal instinct which animals sometimes show, that he was being hunted. And Bighorn's size and age were living records of his sagacity.

The older fellows in the forest service began to tease Jim about his experience with the mountain sheep, and even Matt Shelvy, Jim's supervisor, heard about it. He broached the subject one early fall evening when he and the ranger were working on their summer reports.

"Jim," he said, his eyes twinkling, "I'd better give you a month or two off until you kill that infernal goat."

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Jim said, a little peeved, "He's not a goat, Matt."

The supervisor grinned. One of his chief sources of pleasure in life was to ride old Jim.

"Call him what you like," he said, "but I've never seen anything that could absolutely make me forget my work or spend all of my time chasing it around."

"Then," Jim replied, seriously, "you've got your first glimpse to get of Bighorn."

For a while the talk drifted to lookout houses, maps, summer cattle pastures, surveys—the innumerable problems of a national forest. But the supervisor finally came back to the subject of sheep.

"Jim," he said, "honestly, I'd like to get a peek at anything that can get you so excited. I've got to go up and examine the new trail into Eagle Peak. Suppose we carry grub for a couple of extra days and try to get a look at your sheep."

Jim's eyes became a little brighter at the prospect, but he said in a quiet voice, "I'm willing, Matt."

Jim supplied his supervisor with a light rifle and a light pack. He carried the heavy load on his own back. They made the long trip to Eagle on foot and spent the first day measuring and making notes on the trail. That night they slept in a heavy thicket of balsam just under timberline, and the next day found them in a grotesque land of barren, wind-swept peaks and boulder slides—bighorn country.

FOR almost a day and a half they labored over semi-vertical slopes, sweating in spite of the cold, fighting their way from height to dizzy height, always hoping to get a glimpse of the bighorn sheep which had set Jim's blood on fire.

A greater portion of the supervisor's life had been spent in studying the out-of-doors from books and gleaning his knowledge of forestry from the experience of others, and near the close of the second day his vitality and enthusiasm were at low ebb. His legs were not heavy, like Jim's and his sinews had not been braided from the gut of stamina itself. Now and then he slipped out of his pack and stopped to rest. Jim, hoping to stimulate his interest, pointed out unusual phenomena there on top of the world.

"It's a wonder," he said, once, "that this ground up here has not flattened long ago. It is the worst place in the Northwest for falling rocks. I've heard cliffs crack off once or twice and I've had close calls from solitary tumbling stones. But I never saw one of these huge cliffs topple. If one of them ever fell on us—"

Shelvy said, "Uh-huh." He was in low spirits.

An hour before dark they were winding their way back across the broken slope when Shelvy stopped so suddenly that Jim, close behind, ran into him. When Jim looked up the supervisor was slowly, raising his rifle. Bighorn was merely a few yards ahead, standing on a pinnacle of rock, his massive head thrown back in a gesture of alertness.

Jim put out his hand and pulled down the gun.

"No you don't!" he said.

Shelvy tried to tear the rifle out of Jim's grasp, but he might as well have tried to turn over the crest of Eagle Peak, which towered above them.

"He's mine," said Jim, in an even voice. "When he's killed, I'll do the killing."

Shelvy whirled and struggled for possession of the rifle. Jim, glancing up, saw that the big ram was gone. He released his grip. The supervisor jerked around and stared at the blank rock. He swung back and faced Jim, his face bloodless.

"Damn you!" he shouted, "you spoiled the best shot I ever had a chance to make."

Jim's manner did not change. He lost none of his calmness. There was nothing to tell that he had been excited except the line of his jaw, which was a little blue and more pronounced under the skin.

"That ram," he said, quietly, "is my property. I brought you up here to see him, not to throw lead."

Shelvy did not say any more. He just looked at Jim, his eyes so cold that for a

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minute the ranger stood on the balls of his feet, ready for anything that might happen. Then, without a word, Jim turned south and led the way back toward the towering Eagle.

Night was not far off when they made camp in a clump of boulders. Shelvy did his share of work around the campfire, but it was apparent that the intimate companionship which had existed between them for the past few days was gone. They cooked and ate, they made their beds, in silence.

That night one of the worst fall blizzards that ever whitened the ground raged across the face of Eagle, and the men were two days in reaching the valley where they had left their horses. They traveled the last day without food, and the last few miles with Jim carrying both packs and threatening every few yards to flog Shelvy within an inch of his life if he stopped to rest.

Jim did not tell the story. Shelvy told it and he was indignant about the whole affair. The older heads on the forest wagged with approval and extreme pleasure when the gossip came to their ears. Shelvy made no pretense of his bitterness toward Jim, but if he had any thought of discharging his chief ranger on some pretext, he did not mention it. The supervisor, however, made no secret of the fact that he himself planned to collect the game head which Jim had so ruthlessly pulled out of his grasp.

THAT winter neither of the men made any attempt to search out the deep snows for Bighorn, but the following spring and summer both spent many days alone, ranging up and down the summit of Eagle, watching for the ram.

The rivalry which had sprung up between Shelvy and his old ranger was a much discussed topic at campfires of the trail and road camps.

"I'll bet," said one young, stalwart axman, "that Jim backs out eventually and lets the supervisor have that head."

An old timer snorted.

"Jim Howard? Like hell he will! I got a wife to home, a dollar and a gun that says he don't."

But he was too emphatic. His wager was not taken.

The following winter, however, saw an entirely unexpected turn in the history of Bighorn. The summer before, a lookout house had been constructed on the top of Eagle Peak—a small, comfortable cabin with a glass cupola on top. A lookout man had lived in this throughout the summer, and when he was called in from his post, Jim went up and racked huge stacks of firewood beside the cabin. He told no one of his plans to spend a great many winter days on snow shoes, on top of the range, searching for the animal.

When the first heavy snows of winter fell, Jim moved into the lookout house, prepared to live two weeks there. His first night on the mountain, however, saw the beginning of a blizzard which threatened to continue for many days. Jim cooked supper and sat down to think things over.

The weather was against him, but to be cooped up alone in a small house on top of the world would cost him valuable hours that he could use in his search for Bighorn's band. There was a chance that he could find the sheep in a blizzard. Jim was wise enough in the ways of mountain sheep to know that their thick woolen coats protected them from the cold, and that they would find shelter in some spot which was free of snow and bed down there until the storm was past.

So the second day of the blizzard he left the lookout house to search the northern slopes. Fine, hard snow, driven by a howling wind, cut into his cheeks and stung his lips. He made his way from crag to crag, looking in all of the sheltered places and on barren rock slides where the gale swept the rocks clean of dry snow. All day he forced his way through the terrific wind, and returned to the cabin late in the afternoon, half exhausted. He had failed to find signs of the sheep.

Jim was not discouraged. Fifty years in the woods, scaling the heights and working at endless, heart-rending jobs, had

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blotted the word failure out of his brain. The next morning at gray light he set out again. He left the high tops and wound his way downward into the scrubby trees which grew at the edge of timberline. He searched patiently and just past noon stumbled on a wide swath cut through the snow. His heart jumped. Fresh sheep sign! It had been made by the leader of the band. Jim had seen big rams plunging through the snow gaining a few feet, rising and plunging again.

Jim followed the trail cautiously and came to where it swerved at right angles and dropped downward to the base of a high cliff. The wind drove into that spot like a rapier, whipping away the snow even before it fell. The fine flakes came swirling upward so thickly that he could not see ten feet ahead, but it cleared for a bare instant, affording him a glimpse into the base of the cliff. Bighorn was there with his ewes and lambs.

Two of the ewes had taken prone positions on the cold rock. The lambs were playfully pushing their heads together. They did not appear to mind the cold wind. And—Jim breathed a little quickly—Bighorn stood, stolidly facing into the wind. All this he saw before swirling flakes cut off the picture.

Jim opened his rifle to see that a shell was in the chamber. The opportunity was one which he had endured hardships to make—one he probably would not have again in a long time. He squatted on his heels, waiting for the next rift between the whipping snow flakes.

Half a minute passed before the opening came. In spite of the wind, Jim was hot. His hand tightened on the rifle. Then he started. In his first quick glimpse he had not noticed the shelf of rock which cut the cliff in half. He saw it now. Stretched upon it was the long, tawny body of a mountain lion, his tail twitching slowly from side to side, and Jim instinctively knew that he was ready to spring. Ten feet below him was the little band of sheep. The lambs had pushed to the far side of the clearing, the ewes lay close under the cliff and only one of the animals stood directly under the panther, Bighorn!

Jim threw up his rifle but driving snow swirled in front of the gun. He stood there an eternity before his vision cleared again. The lion had completed his spring, and was fighting to sink his teeth into the neck of the big ram. Jim, half blinded by the wind, drew a quick bead on the cat and pressed the trigger. The snow swirled again and he was unable to see what had happened.

How long he stood there, the ranger never knew. Many minutes passed before the wind changed abruptly and blew the snow upward, away from the mountain. The lambs were huddled against the cliff, close to their mothers. The cat was down and Bighorn was cutting him to ribbons with his sharp feet.

Jim turned abruptly and plunged through the snow, back the way he had come. He cursed himself for being soft hearted, for placing his bullet into the cat instead of the ram, yet deeply within himself he felt a glow of satisfaction because he had again saved the life of the big animal.

Sometimes a small favor makes all the difference in the relationship between two living creatures. Jim's ideas about Bighorn underwent a complete change and he began to direct all of his efforts toward having the sheep on Eagle River Forest protected. The supervisor, who had never spoken intimately to Jim since their trip together on the mountain, laughed when he heard what the old ranger was doing, and sent him a curt message: "Your idea will never be endorsed by this office. Because you cannot take that head, you do not want anyone else to have it."

Jim swallowed the indignity in silence and went to his county law-makers. They introduced a bill in the State Legislature and in the course of six months after Jim had had his little experience with the cougar, bighorn sheep were protected animals in Malcomb County.

When Shelvy heard the news a cold fury gripped him. He sat down and wrote Jim a letter, in which he stated that it was only

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a move to keep Shelvy from collecting the head, and furthermore no man alive, or no law, could keep him from taking a crack at the bighorn sheep if he ever ran across it again. Not only that, but he was going to make an effort to find the animal —a special effort.

JIM did not reply to the letter, but he rode up to the State capital and received a commission as Special Deputy Game Warden. After that he returned to his office at Clarkville and waited.

It was natural that Shelvy should hear of Jim's appointment. He left his office and came up to see the ranger—the first personal visit he had made to the district headquarters in over two years.

"Howard," he said formally, "I've always admired and respected you, in spite of our personal difference about that sheep, and in spite of the lousy trick you played me near the top of Eagle range."

Jim remained silent. He knew that his supervisor was not through.

"And now," said Shelvy, "I want to tell you that I plan to locate that flock and collect your pet sheep out of it. You're not going to stop me."

"In spite of the law?" said Jim.

"Law be damned! You won't arrest me and get by with it. One of us will get fired from the service and it won't be me."

Jim compressed his lips, but he did not reply. He sensed that Shelvy was not making idle boasts. When the supervisor had gone from his office, he called a friend in the headquarters division.

"Tom," he said, "I want you to phone me when the chief leaves there on his hunt for the bighorn, whether it's two days or two months from now."

"I'll let you know," promised Tom.

Less than a week later Tom put through a call to Clarkville.

"Shelvy plans to come up there Saturday, Jim," he said. "He informed the office crew that he would carry on as usual until he returned. He didn't say where he was going, but we all knew."

Jim thanked his friend and hung up. This was Wednesday morning. He had three days to find the flock and chase the animals out of the country. Failing that, he would have to stop Shelvy and warn him about the ram. If the supervisor went on anyway, Jim would follow, get the evidence on him and arrest him. Of course it would mean his resignation from the Forest Service; after nearly thirty years of active duty.

Jim Howard saddled his horse and made the long trip to Eagle Peak. Chester, his lookout man there, had not seen the sheep in two weeks and voiced the opinion that they might have worked in toward Beaver Peak, on the north side of the range.

"I thought you had 'em protected, Jim," he offered.

"That," replied the ranger, "is what's worrying me."

The next morning he left the lookout house and took the ragged skyline toward Beaver Peak. As he traveled, he searched carefully among the high tops, but saw no sign of the sheep. For two days he traveled, and on the third turned back, to wait for Shelvy. He had a feeling that the supervisor might locate Bighorn. He back-tracked himself as far as the high cliffs above Roaring Fork and sat down to wait.

Three hours passed before Shelvy put in his appearance. He carried a pack on his back, moving slowly under the weight of it.

Heavy load, thought Jim. He intends to stay up here for some time.

Shelvy came up the long, winding trail from the creek. He stopped to rest where the trail reached the top of the cliff. He slipped out of his pack and sat down, breathing heavily from the hard climb.

Jim watched him a moment before he spoke. His voice was low.

"You'd better go back, pardner, before it's too late. I don't want trouble."

Shelvy sprang to his feet and whirled, his face white.

"Trouble," he said, "well, you're going to get trouble, plenty of it. If you inter-

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fere with my trip this time, ruin my hunt, by God, I'll—kill you!"

Not a flicker of emotion crossed Jim's face. His eyes did not change.

"Son," he said, "you're my boss, but we're up here now where there ain't nobody but you and me and God Almighty, and I want to tell you one thing: when you've watched these hills and crags as long as I have, and when you've found out how they can live and breathe and destroy, you won't think things like that."

Shelvy shouldered his pack. He said, "Rats!"

Jim sat there many minutes before he leisurely arose and followed. He had plenty of time. The sheep were not in the vicinity of Eagle Peak. Shelvy would pass the night in the lookout house on Eagle, and hunt out the slopes back in toward Beaver on the following day. When he left the lookout house, Jim's eyes would be upon him from some high point along the range, and he would never be out of Jim's sight all day.

The next morning, darkness had not flowed away from the eastern rim of the earth before Jim Howard finished his breakfast and made his pack. While the sky was melting from black to gray, he climbed to Stormy Point, the highest crag between Eagle and Beaver Peaks. He stood there like a picturesque statue while the red sun popped over the edge of a distant purple range and swept into the sky.

Jim stirred when the sun warmed his cheek. He crawled to the lookout rock of Stormy and trained his glasses on the barren slopes which led down from Eagle. Shelvy had not appeared. Every few minutes for an hour Jim searched the peak with his glasses before he got a glimpse of the supervisor, working his way down the slope.

Jim waited. The man made a long detour over the northern edge of the range, then cut back close to the crest of Stormy Point. From there he turned in toward Beaver Peak. Jim arose and followed, almost a quarter of a mile behind.

The old ranger saw Bighorn before Shelvy did. He saw Shelvy drop behind a ledge near the junction of Stormy and Beaver Peak. Jim wormed his way to a high rock where he could look down on the hunter. Shelvy was hidden by a small cliff. At his left rose a higher wall of rock, lying above and at right angles to the cliff behind which Shelvy crouched. The ranger had stopped two hundred yards above.

Shelvy pulled his handkerchief from his pocket, tied it on a dead stick and thrust it above the ledge.

He's been studying bighorn sheep in books, thought Jim Howard.

Though they were approximately half a mile away, the white handkerchief attracted the attention of the sheep immediately. The big leader threw up his head and gazed at it for a long time. Then he moved forward and disappeared into a little stone gulch which lay between him and the hunter.

Jim wondered if Shelvy possessed the patience to remain hidden while the sheep made his long stalk to the white thing which had attracted him. The supervisor did. Thirty minutes later the big ram came into sight on the same plateau against which Shelvy lay. He was less than five hundred yards from the man. Jim slipped open the breech to see that his rifle was loaded. The sheep stood with his band for long minutes before he advanced cautiously, a few yards at a time.

He was three hundred yards away when Jim saw Shelvy push his rifle over the rim of the small cliff which separated him from the animal. Jim turned his gun in the same direction for a warning shot to scare the sheep.

Then he noticed something else, that he had not seen before. The large cliff on the supervisor's left was splitting. A small crack had appeared on top, was widening. His ears caught a sibilant roar. In another few seconds an avalanche of rock would descend on the spot where Shelvy stood. There was no time to yell, no time to warn the man with words.

Jim's mind became a thing of animal cells, operated by instinct. He swung his

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rifle downward, in line with the supervisor, and pulled the trigger. He saw the bullet fleck granite chips from the ledge at Shelvy's side, and was conscious of the bullet singing into space. He shot again and again. He heard Shelvy's yell, saw the man jump for the safety of the rock, away from where the ranger lay, away from the splitting granite ledge. Then the scene became a confusion of flying stones, a roar of crashing rocks as the huge cliff toppled over. Jagged granite leaped out into space.

Jim was sweating when he bounded down the ledge toward where he had last seen Shelvy. He crossed the new rock slide. He found the supervisor crouched against the wall, his gun, the sheep, forgotten. The man's eyes and black brows were in startling contrast to his white face. Jim looked at him for a long minute.

"Close call, pardner," he said.

Shelvy stood up. He stared at Jim Howard as though the ranger had suddenly become a new person. He took an unsteady step forward and extended his hand.

"Thanks, Jim," he said. "I reckon I deserved what I almost got."

They stood shoulder to shoulder on the high edge of the world. Blue valleys and blue distance flowed out from the mountain. Bighorn and his band were gone. The old eagle which floated silently above them was accustomed to falling cliffs, but he closely watched these two strange creatures who had invaded his domain.

"I've sort of been thinking all day," said Shelvy, "about what you said back yonder on the trail, Jim. Now I know you were right."

The old man waved his gnarled hand. It included the barren heights, the eagle, the sweet of earth under their feet . . . the home of Bighorn. That was his answer.

THE END

Unknown Quicksand

QUICKSAND remains one of the mysteries of nature. A few attempts have been made to study it, but the results only prove that the sand is as much a pitfall to the student as to the traveler. For instance, one scientist claims that quicksand always contains clay; another says he finds little clay or none. Many believe that the sand has a slipperiness because its particles are round instead of jagged; but several find that quicksand may be fine and jagged particles held in suspension by an upward current of water.

On one thing all seem to agree—that it is always full of water and that the only quicksands in deserts are in the beds of streams. The danger spots are wet holes in beaches, the hollow rear margins of beaches, edges of sand bars and mouths of rivers. As to whether the treacherous sand exerts a suction, even that is not definitely known. By one scientist it is pointed out that ships have been known to stick in quicksand and sink beyond all hope of refloating. Another points out that because sand is heavier than water, no person can sink out of sight. Not unless he struggles, anyway.

Stories of men, animals and ships sinking into sand have come from the earliest times. One of the most reliable is that of a railroad train which climbed a bumper and fell into the nearby dry Platte River at Pueblo, Colorado. In a few minutes it was completely out of sight. Grappling hooks were let down as far as fifty feet, but the empty train was never found.

—*Delos White.*

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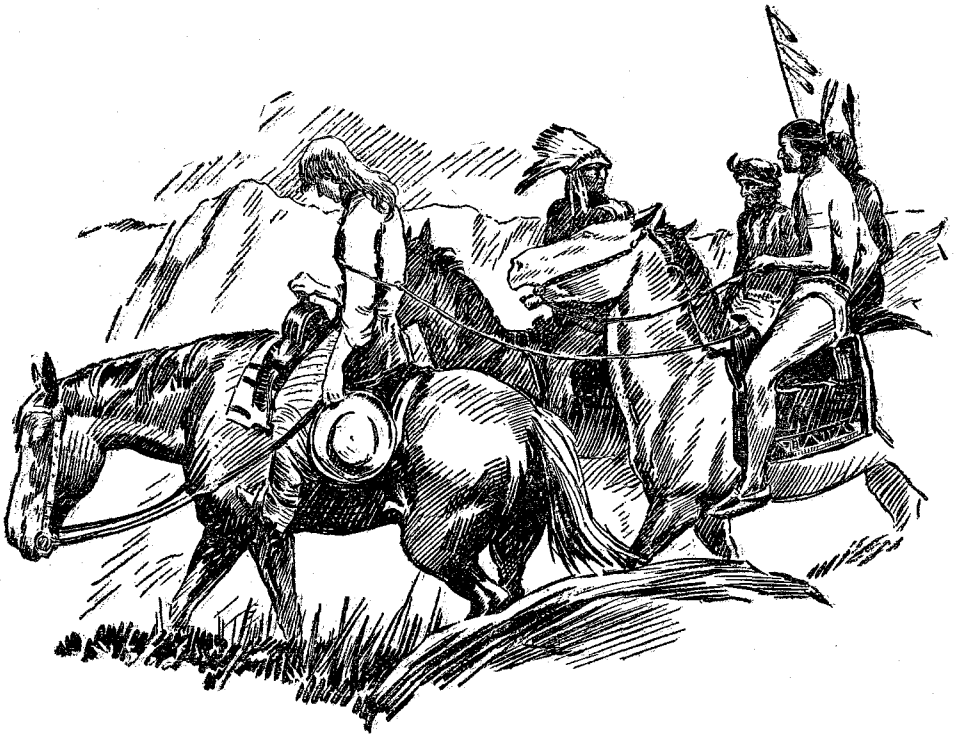

As a sign of possession, Walk-by-Night had tossed a lariat around Maisry

The Sacred Valley

By MAX BRAND

A brave white man with the heart of a red savage, Rusty Sabin returned to the primitive Cheyennes as their strongest warrior

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

ON the day that Rusty Sabin (known among the Cheyenne Indians as "Red Hawk") buys supplies in the town of Witherell with gold which he has mined from the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, he visits the house of Richard Lester. Charlie Galway, who chances to pass by, notices the gold nuggets and while stealing them, murders Lester.

The inhabitants of Witherell, aroused by the murder, accuse Standing Bull of the crime. Standing Bull is a Cheyenne, who was with Rusty at the scene of the killing. Rusty pleads for a fair trial, and when he sees that the whites are not treating his friend squarely, he and Standing Bull manage to ride off on Rusty's white stallion. But Standing Bull is severely wounded in the escape.

Not long after Rusty's return to the Cheyenne encampment, Running Elk, tribal Medicine Man, declares that the Sky People have ordered a sacrifice for Standing Bull's recovery.

Rusty is taken to the Valley of Death to die, but Sweet Medicine, in the guise of a huge owl, leads him to a cave through which he escapes to the Sacred Valley.

The Cheyennes, now suffering from drought, decide that a further offering should be made to Sweet Medicine. So the young, beautiful Blue Bird is led to the Valley of Death. Red Hawk chances to meet Blue Bird. She leaves to go to her people, and Rusty rolls away the stone of the dam which he had built, thereby giving relief to his people.

This story began in the Argosy for August 10

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Meanwhile Charlie Galway rides to the Sacred Valley and discovers gold. He approaches a lonely shack in the Valley where he encounters Rusty, who declares that Galway must die because he has entered the Sacred Valley. But a vague sign from Sweet Medicine saves Galway, and Rusty permits him to leave the Valley.

Galway plans to reënter the Valley with a band of his friends; and inasmuch as Running Elk wants to meet the whites in battle, the clouds of war appear to be gathering. Rusty tries to stop the advance of the Cheyennes in their war intentions, and appears before them as in a visionary sign from Sweet Medicine.

While Galway's expedition is en route to the Sacred Valley, one of his scouts meets Blue Bird and takes her captive. Bringing her back to Galway, it is soon realized that with Blue Bird as a prisoner, the Cheyennes will be wary of attacking Galway's band.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SCALP OF MAISRY.

THE blood-red mare whipped Maisry away from the long reach of Jerry Pike; and right across the prairie in a red flash the mare bore her. Three dizzy miles of sprinting, and then the horse stopped, down-headed, utterly winded by that wild effort. And not until then did Maisry's mind clear.

She could think of the Blue Bird, then, with a sudden regret that she had not been able to help her companion. She pulled at the hanging head of the red mare and looked back, and before her she saw half a dozen Indians jogging their ponies casually towards her.

Fear slid with her breathing down her throat, nauseated her; she was helpless. She could feel the tremor of utter fatigue in the body of the mare and knew that the knees of the bay were quivering. She could not run. She could only remain there in the saddle and study the danger as it developed before her. Even if the mare had been fresh as the morning, it seemed to her impossible to escape from the wild-headed, light-limbed Indian ponies.

As they came closer, the mare lifted her head and snorted with fear. There was a last terrible temptation to flee no matter how spent the mare might be. That temptation she fought down.

All Indian braves at all times, she knew, were dangerous. But these warriors were painted for the war path. The streaks of paint, yellow, red, blue, black, purple, robbed them of all human semblance. They were Cheyennes. She could be grateful that she spoke that tongue. The slowness with which they approached gave her a greater hope still. But as they came up, they were pointing her out to one another.

She threw up her right hand in the Indian gesture of greeting. "How!" she called out, and rejoiced that her voice was strong and steady.

They gave her no answer. They came right on. A young brave, the youngest of that terrible group, said to the others, quietly: "I first saw. The scalp is mine."

"That is the law," said the oldest of the group.

The youngster stopped his pony close beside Maisry. The pony was smaller than the red mare, but the bulk of the warrior made him tower above her. The oily paint glistened like blood of many colors on his skin. Moccasins and a loin strap were his only clothes. She breathed, faintly, the peculiar odor of a sweating Indian.

He pulled from her head the wide-brimmed straw hat.

"Look!" said he to the others. "This would be a scalp worth showing. It is bright. It is bright enough to shine by its own light."

He thrust his hand into the hair. Unknotted, it flowed down her back, a shining ripple. Still she could speak, steadily. It was as though another voice were coming from another throat.

"I am not an enemy," she said. "I belong to one of your people."

The young brave, knife in hand, freshened his grip on her hair.

"You belong to one of my people. You belong to Walk-by-Night. His hands are on you. Ay, you belong to a Cheyenne."

"I am not your woman, Walk-by-Night," she said. "I am the woman of Red Hawk."

"*Hai!*" exclaimed Walk-by-Night. "Red

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Hawk never took a squaw. Why do you tell the thing that is not so?"

"He has sent for me, and that is why I am here," she answered.

"He is a ghost! He is dead and a ghost!" exclaimed Walk-by-Night. He began to laugh. He turned his head towards the others, still with that braying laughter. "She says that a dead man has sent for her! Do you hear?"

"It is true. He is not dead. He lives in the Sacred Valley," said the girl.

Walk-by-Night lifted his hand and moved the knife so that it flashed in her eyes. The hand lacked the little finger, a sacrifice to the Sky People to bring luck and scalps on the warpath, perhaps. It was a big hand. The wrist tendons stood out in great cords under the pull of the forearm muscles.

"Call to Red Hawk now, and he will save you if you belong to him," said Walk-by-Night. "A ghost can come quickly. Call to him. When I see him, then I will believe."

"Wait!" said the oldest of the warriors. Walk-by-Night turned his head.

AND the senior continued: "Who can tell? She has eyes into which a man can look a long way. Such women are not liars. Think of this, Walk-by-Night: If she truly belongs to Red Hawk, what will happen to you if you kill her?"

"Why should I fear a ghost?" asked Walk-by-Night.

"We know what that ghost did only a night ago," said the brave. "You saw the Pawnee lying dead with two long gashes in his body. If you kill this woman, perhaps we will find you one morning with the owl feather in your hair and death in your body."

Walk-by-Night let his grasp fall from the hair of Maisry.

He sighed: "If I had that scalp tied to the end of a lance, it would be a fine thing to see the hair blow in the wind and shine in the sun. It would be better than the counting of ten coups to have a scalp like that, Spotted Dog." His eyes shone covetously.

Spotted Dog reached out his brawny arm and stroked the sleek of the long hair. Because of his words, the girl looked at him with the slightest of smiles. He suddenly ceased to be terrible to her.

"Yes," said Spotted Dog, "it is a very fine scalp to take. Black Antelope had one years ago. It was sacrificed in the time of the great sickness. But if I were you, I would wait until I had made a little more sure about Red Hawk. Lazy Wolf told me once that Red Hawk was to take a squaw among the white people. Perhaps this is the woman. Running Elk will know what to do about her. He will make medicine and find out what to do."

"*Ai, ai!*" said Walk-by-Night. "Shall I wait for that?"

He drew out the hair to its full length, holding it up in the sun. "Look!" he said. "It is like fire. A handful of cool fire. I never saw anything so beautiful."

"Well, it will stay on her head and not disappear," said Spotted Dog. "No one will steal her away from you."

"That is true. We'll go back now to the others."

As they rode, it seemed that a sort of homesickness, a pathetic yearning was in Walk-by-Night. He could not look on the hair of the girl without mournfulness coming into his eyes.

And so hope kept growing up higher and higher in the breast of the girl. It was not a real expectation that she might keep her life, but she was able to breathe without having that strangling hand of cold shut down upon her throat.

The mare, thoroughly recovered, was ready for running now, but there was no chance for Maisry to slip away and flee from the party. Walk-by-Night prevented that. As a sign of possession he had tossed the noose of a rawhide lariat around her and rode with the other end of it tied to the pommel of his saddle.

So, as the evening came on, they sighted first the water of a small stream where the horses were allowed to drink, and after-

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wards the little scattered encampment of the war-party appeared.

The numbers of the men amazed her. Twenty Indians or so were all that went out on most expeditions; but here there were hundreds who raised a murmur and then a cheerful shouting, as they saw the prisoner brought in.

The encampment itself was merely a circle of saddles and a few meager blankets or light buffalo robes. In the center of the circle the ground had been dug away to serve as a small fireplace; but no fire would be lighted until after dark, of course. In the meantime, the warriors smoked their pipes, chewed parched corn, and ate more than half-raw the game which was brought in by scouting parties of hunters from time to time.

It was an uneasy body of warriors, since the sight of the ghost had stopped them abruptly on the warpath. A ghost that passes and leaves behind it the body of a dead Pawnee with the sign of Sweet Medicine attached—such a ghost should be heeded, surely.

But old Running Elk would not definitely turn back from his great adventure; he would not give up the hope of commencing a war with the whites. Ruin might come to the Cheyennes in the long run from such a conflict, but in the meantime Running Elk might remain the head of all the warriors. And the old man hungered for power and glory with a terrible appetite.

WHEN Maisry was brought before him, she found herself looking at a face which seemed, at first, decades too young for the withered body beneath it; but when she was close she could see that time merely had dried the face in smooth surfaces instead of in wrinkles. There was the hard, brittle look of a mummy about the medicine man. It was almost strange that he could part his lips without cracking them.

"Here, Running Elk," said the Spotted Dog, "is the woman that Walk-by-Night saw first and therefore she belongs to him. But she says she is Red Hawk's squaw."

A gleam of brilliant malice brightened the old eyes of Running Elk. That brightness stabbed the hope of Maisry and left it dead.

"What am I to do?" asked Running Elk. "I ask you if ghosts have squaws?"

"Ay, but Red Hawk never was like other people. This woman says that he is no longer dead. She says that he is living again, in the Sacred Valley; and she says that he has sent for her."

"How did the message come?" asked the medicine man.

"The Blue Bird brought it," said the girl.

Running Elk narrowed those prying, brilliant eyes again.

"You say that the Blue Bird rode all alone, all the way to the towns of the white men and gave you that message?"

"Yes. She brought it to me."

"Why did she do that?"

"She wanted to call Red Hawk out of the Sacred Valley, to stop the Cheyennes before they began to fight with the white people."

"Did she know that Red Hawk was inside the Sacred Valley?"

"Yes."

"*Ah hai!*" cried Running Elk. "Then why did she not call him out herself?"

"Because he would not come to her; but she thought that he would come to me."

Running Elk picked up a light robe and pulled it over his shoulders and up like a hood over his head. Through the shadow of it he kept peering at the girl. The sun was almost down. The western light gilded his dry, hard skin. He seemed to be smiling, but his good nature was sheerest illusion. She could feel his hands reaching for her life.

He said: "Walk-by-Night, give me some present and then I shall try to find out the truth."

"Here!" said Walk-by-Night. "Here is the horse on which she was riding. It is only a mare but it looks like a fast runner. The color is good."

"The color is very bad," said the medi-

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cine man. "See how it flashes! It can be seen for miles away when the sun strikes it. However—I shall accept it."

He waved his hand and called one of the youths who attended the warriors on the battle trail.

"Take this red mare," he said. "It is mine. Drive it down the creek to the place where my horses are grazing. Keep them away from the rest of the herd."

The lad took the red mare and led it away obediently. And the mare, as it walked off, pulled back and whinnied after its mistress. Tears came into the eyes of Maisry. She winked them out again and saw the mare disappear over the edge of the creek bank. Hope was gone now. She turned back with a stony sense of despair to watch Running Elk make medicine before the eyes of the warriors.

He was doing the simplest of all rites. He was merely making a circle on the ground and then, standing inside it, he picked up a handful of dust and blew it away, leaving a few glittering little specks of rock in the palm of his hand.

He lifted his head and said quietly: "Sky People, if I am wrong, speak to me! If the truth lies in the message of the little stones in my hand, be silent."

After a moment he lowered his head again, tossed away the tiny pebbles, and deliberately dusted his hands.

"The medicine is true and strong and good," he said. "It tells me that she has said the thing that is not true. She is yours, Walk-by-Night. Sharpen your knife and take off the scalp cleanly and neatly."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AGAIN SWEET MEDICINE.

THE lad who took the red mare down the creek to the rest of the horses which were reserved for Running Elk—a band of half a dozen chosen ponies—hobbled the bay and turned her loose to graze with the rest. When she tried to get away and turn back towards the encampment, the lad tethered her to the lariat of another horse.

He had just finished this work and was about to return to the warriors on the run when he saw a miracle before his eyes, towards the west. He could swear—afterward he did indeed vow—that at one moment there was nothing, and the next moment out of the dazzle of the sunset appeared the form of Red Hawk on the great White Horse.

It might have been explained that the bank of the creek wound around a sharp elbow turn at this point, but to the young Cheyenne nothing would ever dim the terrible splendor of that miraculous happening. He fell flat on his face, groaning: "Mercy, Sweet Medicine! Be merciful! Red Hawk, do not turn my blood to water. Do not draw the living breath out of my lungs. Do not stop my heart. Let me live! Do not take my spirit away to ride with yours in the Happy Hunting Grounds!"

Above him he heard a quite voice saying: "You shall not be harmed. I bring you nothing but good fortune. But tell me what one of the braves owns the red mare you brought down the creek? I only have seen one other like her. Who is her owner?"

"Running Elk is her owner, Red Hawk!" gasped the boy.

It seemed to him that a darkness was coming over his eyes, that he was dying. His breath was failing, too. But it was merely the dying of the sunset and the choking hand of fear that made the difference.

"From whom did Running Elk get her? From some white trader?" asked Red Hawk.

"Walk-by-Night captured a white woman who rode this mare; he has just brought her into the camp. He has not even taken her scalp yet—" said the lad.

And then—he swore afterwards—thunder rushed past him. He breathed dust. He saw fire struck out of the rocks. And when his wits returned, the great White Horse and the rider both were gone. There was only a thin mist hanging in the air.

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A mist of dust? The Cheyenne boy never would believe that. He would swear that Red Hawk had disappeared in a flash, to reappear again, as suddenly, in the midst of the Cheyenne camp.

For no man had an eye behind him, in that encampment. In a dense circle the warriors had gathered to watch the killing and the scalping of the prisoner. It was a thing they had seen often enough before, but the relish of it was never off the roots of their tongues.

Walk-by-Night was in no hurry. He enjoyed the center of the stage, being a young brave who had counted only two coups in his limited experience. He ran his hand over the face of the girl and said to those around him:

"Look, brothers! The white girl is not made like an Indian. The skin is thinner. It is so thin that it would hardly keep out the rainy weather. Her throat is so soft that I could crush the windpipe like that of a young goose, between my thumb and finger. Shall I kill her that way and let her kick and choke on the ground? Give me good advice. There is no reason why she should die too quickly. She ought to take many steps, going to the world of the spirits and not jump off the earth at one step."

Running Elk said: "She is about to faint. After that, she would feel nothing. Cut her across the face and see if that will bring back her senses."

"Good!" said Walk-by-Night, and taking her by the nape of the neck in one powerful hand, he lifted the hunting knife.

That was when the voice shouted suddenly; and as the warriors turned, amazed, they saw Red Hawk on the White Horse pressing straight in among them. A wild outcry broke from their throats, terror in every voice except that of Running Elk who shouted: "Strike the knife home! She is yours, Walk-by-Night."

But Walk-by-Night had dropped on his face, crying: "Red Hawk, be merciful! I thought she lied . . . I did not know she belonged to you."

Sabin slipped from his horse. He had seen Maisry throw up her arms, but the wild cry of hope stopped in her throat as though a blow had ended it. He was in time to catch her as she fell and stretch her on the ground. He pressed a hand over her heart, and felt it throbbing; so he was able to draw breath. And his hand still felt that reassuring pulsation while he looked up at the faces around him.

THE braves were stretching out their hands towards him, gingerly touching his clothes, his long hair. And as their trembling hands touched the real substance they began to exclaim: "It is he! He went into the Valley of Death, but he is not dead! He is not a ghost. The horse, also, is living!"

He remained on one knee by the girl, saying briefly: "Stay back. Let the wind reach her. Walk-by-Night, stand up. I am not angry with you. Running Elk, you withered dog, I see the hate in your face. You have done this! Did she not use my name? Did she not speak of me?"

"She did!" said many voices.

Walk-by-Night exclaimed again: "She said she was your woman. I brought her here and Running Elk made medicine which proved that what she said was not true. I would not have touched your woman, Red Hawk. Be merciful! Do not speak to Sweet Medicine against me!"

"If he spoke, he would not be heard!" shouted Running Elk. "What are you doing, staring like foolish men? Did not Sweet Medicine tell us once to make a sacrifice? Why has he come back to us again in the flesh? To be sacrificed again! To give his blood again! It is the will of Sweet Medicine! I hear the voices of the Sky People! He is ours for the sacrifice! Put hands on him. I give the command. I use the words of the Sky People as they sing in my ears! Walk-by-Night, Spotted Dog—all of you seize on him or I shall wither your right hands—I shall make such a medicine that—"

Sabin stood up, with one downward glance at the pale face of the girl. And she, regaining her senses, began to push

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herself up into a sitting posture, so that she seemed to be grovelling against his knees. Half between sleep and walking she heard him thunder: "Are you men? Are you my people, or are you yelping dogs?"

"We are not your people. Your skin is white. Your soul is white. Sweet Medicine gives you to us."

A dozen tentative hands were reaching towards Sabin. He shouted angrily: "Shall I give you a sign? Shall I bring the god out of the air? Sweet Medicine, appear!"

He threw up his right hand high over his head. His whistle sounded piercingly. And the startled Cheyennes, looking up in turn, saw a huge night owl, greater than ever they had seen before, sweeping down from the sunset sky, sweeping straight down upon them with reaching talons outstretched.

A howl of terror burst from the crowd. From the noise the owl rebounded and left on the ground that mass of warriors in prostrate heaps, and Sabin standing among them with both his arms uplifted.

He said: "Why should I speak to the god for the sake of a worthless people? Why should I intercede for the Cheyennes when the braves are willing to follow an evil old man whose brain is dead except for the planning of wickedness. It was he who persuaded you to drive me out. Running Elk then put his spells on the body of my friend, Standing Bull. So he made himself a great man among you, and like foolish children you followed him.

"But the mercy of Sweet Medicine was very great. First he punished you with drought to open your eyes to wisdom. But when you came yammering for mercy, begging for water, I prayed to the god, and he taught me what to do—and water was sent to you. Rain came afterwards. But why should a god be merciful to such a stupid people? Now he sends me among you again. Sweet Medicine, hear me. It is I, Red Hawk, standing among these foolish people, whose faces are on the ground. See them, pity them, forgive them for my sake."

He drew a great breath. "That is ended," he said. "The wrath of the god is removed from my heart. He is more pitying than wrathful. You may lift your faces again. You may rise. Walk-by-Night, I bear no evil feeling against you. Rise, every man. Let the horses be caught and saddled. I shall tell you in what direction you may march. And let no man listen again to the snarling of Running Elk. Running Wolf he should be called—running dog-wolf, old, and only with a tooth to bite fools. Obey my orders. Prepare for the march. I go off to let my anger cool and my heart grow smaller. I go to pray to Sweet Medicine to give more wisdom to his people . . ."

He drew up the girl to her feet and then turned and walked out of the crowd.

She, still dizzy of mind and weak of body, saw all things unsteady and reeling before her. But through the dimness of the sunset she could see the terror only gradually fading out of those grotesquely painted faces. She could see them getting cautiously to their feet as though filled with fear.

But they drew back from before her as she walked after Sabin. They drew back as though she were a living flame. They stared at her with great, haunted eyes, and on all sides she heard the frightened, subdued, bass murmuring prayer: "Sweet Medicine, be merciful!"

It seemed to her that Rusty Sabin was a giant among men as he strode on.

The great White Horse followed him faithfully. Never once did he look behind towards the girl but, as an Indian chief should do, advanced with his head high, unaware of the world behind him, facing the future. She felt that she was, in fact, his woman; went meekly behind him.

CHAPTER XXV.

GALWAY'S TREACHERY.

WORD came in to Galway on the run from a galloping horseman. Far ahead, the leading scouts had been met by a deputation of Cheyenne Indians,

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including one fat, bearded white man who acted as interpreter. The Indians wished to know why the whites were in their territory, and where they were heading. There were two or three hundred warriors on the war path and it seemed advisable to go with care.

Galway simply said: "I'll go out and break the bad news to them. I'll let them know that we're traveling with a hostage along with us. Eh, Blue Bird?"

He turned and looked at the Indian girl. She sat on the driver's seat of the big wagon and turned an impassive face towards the speaker. But big Charlie Galway was accustomed to this indifference and paid no attention to it. He merely laughed.

"I'm going to show you to 'em, Blue Bird," he said. "I think you'll be the charm that shows us through!"

He did what he promised. He took ten picked men with the Blue Bird in the middle of them and rode out to meet the Indians, advancing a hundred yards or more from the caravan. It had coiled into a circle like a sensitive worm, by this time, with ready marksmen, rifle in hand, looking out through the irregular wall made by the wagons. Indians were everywhere, by this time. They seemed to sprout up out of the tall grass in all directions. Their feathered heads showed here and there against the horizon. But the greater mass of them was directly in the line of the caravan's intended march.

Just out of pointblank rifle fire, Galway halted his men; and at once, a party of eleven Indians advanced from the throng ahead.

There was a horse litter in the eleven that came on; there was also a rider on a white horse.

The Blue Bird cried out, softly: "Red Hawk!"

Galway knew enough Cheyenne to identify that name. He turned and gave the girl a sharp glance.

"What is Red Hawk to you, Blue Bird?" he asked.

But the girl was silent. There had been that moment of flashing excitement, and now she was calm again and looked at him with the filmed, unconscious eye.

The Indian deputation came on with the horse litter at the side of Rusty Sabin, whose red hair blew aslant on the breeze. They came straight up to Galway's party; but as they halted the proud Cheyennes forgot their dignity to break out into a sudden chorus of exclamations. They were pointing—a thing a warrior never should do. It was the Blue Bird that they were distinguishing. Only Sabin himself said not a word and gave no sign as he saw the girl. He merely called out: "Galway, the war chief of the Cheyennes is here with me. Standing Bull got up from a sickbed and came out to inquire why the whites were marching through the land of the Cheyennes. What answer have you for him?"

"We're not the first caravan that ever went across the plains," said Galway.

"The others were bound for California and gold," said Rusty. "They carried along women and children; they went to make homes. You go out with a great many men and very few wagons. The Cheyennes are afraid that you mean to make trouble."

A huge, emaciated Indian arose from the horse litter and stood beside Sabin. That was Standing Bull. The white men stared at him curiously, for his fame had reached Witherell long before. He looked like a man who should have remained in his bed for a considerable time. But the energy with which he had rallied himself to the field still remained fresh in him. He stood straight, handling a long lance, returning the stare of the white men with a proud interest.

Galway was answering: "Suppose that you and I ride apart, Rusty. We have some things to say to one another."

"This way!" answered Sabin, and turned the White Horse immediately to the side. He rode twenty or thirty paces from the others and Galway went out to meet him at once, merely saying to his men: "If anything happens, shoot down Sabin. I

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can't tell you where we're going, but I can say that he already knows. If he tries to murder me, get him out of the way and everything will be easy after that. Without him the Cheyennes won't be worth a damn. With him, they're about as good as regular soldiers. He showed that a couple of years ago when he cleaned up the Pawnees."

HE rode up to Sabin, after that, leaving his men handling their rifles. The Indians, on their part, pretended no concern, but it was plain that the nervous tension was high on both sides.

As he came up drawing rein, Galway said: "Well, Rusty, I didn't think that I'd run into you as far away from the Sacred Valley as all this."

"You are going back to it, of course?" asked Sabin.

"Back to the Sacred Valley? No, we're just out on a hunting trip."

"It's the gold of the Sacred Valley," said Sabin. "Do your men know that?"

"They don't know. What a fool I'd be to tell 'em," answered Galway. "I'll tell you what, Rusty, you're a fool if you don't throw in with us."

"You swore to me," said Sabin, "that you would never come back to the Sacred Valley."

"An oath a fellow takes when it's forced from him don't count," said Galway. "You had a gun on me when I promised that."

"You lied to me then, and you would lie again," said Sabin. "But turn around and go back to Witherell. I can guard the mouth of the Sacred Valley with half a dozen men."

"If you block the way into the valley," said Galway, "I'll cut the throat of your sweetheart, Rusty. I'll cut the throat of Blue Bird, back there."

"Will you murder her? I think you will," said Rusty, slowly.

"Why, man," answered Galway, "I saw her walk out of the Sacred Valley about a minute before the water came sluicing through. She had the look of a gal pretty dizzy with love. I reckon she's worth a good deal to you. Take a sentimental damn fool like you, and she's worth more than all the gold in the Valley.

"Anyway, I make the bargain with you. Turn loose the Cheyennes and send them home, and I'll turn loose the Blue Bird and make it a bargain. Block my way into the Sacred Valley and I'll raise hell with you; I'll do it by rubbing out the Indian half-breed."

Rusty looked earnestly on him. "I think it is the will of the god that I should kill you now, Galway," he said.

"If you kill me," said Galway, carelessly, "I've got my men watching, and they'll load you full of lead. I know you're a fast man and an accurate man with a gun, Rusty. But the sooner I drop, the sooner you go to hell."

"If I can keep the whites out of the Sacred Valley," said Rusty, "do you think that I'm unready to die? *Ah hai,* Galway—you must think that life is a very great thing to me."

Galway grew a little pale. He answered: "And after you're dead—and me dead, too—what hell will happen to the Blue Bird? I've kept a lot of trouble away from her since she's been with us, already."

"The Blue Bird!" murmured Rusty Sabin, and then he was silent, still staring at the incredible infamy of this white man.

"Kind of hurts you, doesn't it?" asked Galway. "I could see the gal fitted into your idea of a female, and you're sour when you see her held up."

"You have prices for all things," said Rusty. "What is your price for the Blue Bird?"

"Prices? Sabin—don't be a fool—as long as we have her, we can get at the gold in the Sacred Valley. Can you offer us more than that?"

"I am more to the Cheyennes than the Blue Bird," said Rusty. "If I come into your hands, will you set her free to go back to her own people?"

"Set *her* free? Exchange her for you? Rusty, do you mean it?"

"I mean it."

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"Why, Rusty, you're the chief interpreter of Sweet Medicine for the tribe. They'd as soon put Sweet Medicine in danger as let you be in trouble. You *will* exchange yourself for the Blue Bird?"

"I don't lie, as you do," said Sabin. "I tell you the truth. Set the girl free, and I go in with you."

"I'll do it, then," said Galway. "Will you come back with me now?"

"Yes. Now," said Rusty. "I go to say farewell to the Cheyennes and then I return."

He swung away on the White Horse and galloped back to the place where Standing Bull was now reclining in his horse litter of two saplings bound to the stirrups of a pair of ponies.

SABIN gripped the hand of the sick man. An eye of profound trust and of endless affection stared back at him.

"I go among the white again, Standing Bull," said Rusty. "This, I think, is the last time that I shall see you. Remember that I am Cheyenne to my last moment. Think of me in times of happiness. Farewell."

He flashed back into the saddle and was away before Standing Bull could grasp the significance of these words and make a protest or any answer. But the Cheyennes began to shout in astonishment when they saw that worker of great medicine, Red Hawk himself, pass carelessly into the group of the white men about Galway.

Sabin heard Galway order: "Turn the girl loose, some of you, and let her go back to her own kind."

He heard the words, but he did not see the wink that accompanied them. For the rest, his eyes were blinded by melancholy as he rode on among the riflemen.

He had left Maisry in the safe hands of Lazy Wolf, who had accompanied Standing Bull into the plains to join the war party. It would be grief for her when she knew that he was gone. It would be grief for the Blue Bird when she knew that his life was paying for hers. But he felt, with a strange certainty, that he was no more than a price that must be laid down. A white skin and the soul of an Indian, life appeared to him an endless entanglement.

In the grip of that thought, he entered the one small gap in the circle of wagons and heard vaguely, behind him, the angry shouting of the Cheyennes. At last they were seeming to understand what had happened.

And then he heard Galway shouting: "When you look around for a smart trader, remember me, lads. I've taken out the Blue Bird and brought her back—and along with her, I've got one that's worth ten Blue Birds. I've great high medicine man himself; I've got the fool of a white Indian. I've got Rusty Sabin himself."

Sabin jerked up his head from the bewilderment of his thoughts and saw that it was true. Behind him, in the cluster of Galway's riders, was the Blue Bird!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"LET ME DIE NOW—"

THERE was only a single comment from Rusty Sabin. He merely said: "I was born too foolish to live among the whites; and my white skin keeps me from being a Cheyenne; I am a man of nothing. Only the god will have me! But you—Galway—"

He jerked the revolver from its holster on his saddle as he spoke, but he was much too late. Big, capable hands grappled his arm and made him helpless; the gun was jerked from his grasp; a lariat tossed over his shoulders bound his arms tightly to his sides.

He could hear the voice of the Blue Bird crying out: "Red Hawk, was it for me? Was it for me? How worthless and wretched I am!"

Her voice, also, ceased. She was being hurried off the cover of a wagon. A huge shouting arose from all the men inside the lager. There was laughter and a joyous uproar; many shouted praises of Galway.

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And in another moment the order was given, and the wagons began to move forward. They maintained their circle. Outside of them, the Cheyennes swept down in charge after charge, never driving the shock home because they knew that, in case of an attack, both the Blue Bird and the greatest of their medicine men would die at once in the hands of the whites. But they had to give some vent to their fury. And so they raged around and around the caravan, shooting their rifles into the air, yelling like fiends.

Far away among the Cheyennes, where Standing Bull was being transported in his horse litter and watching the vain charges of his people, the old, dry-faced medicine man, Running Elk, was shouting: "Now, if Red Hawk is the favored son of Sweet Medicine, let the god work for him. If his medicine is strong, let him rip apart the circle of the wagons—that is easy for a god to do. Nothing is hard for Sweet Medicine!"

And inside the circle, Galway was saying to one of his men, simply: "If we try to carry this fellow along with us, he'll slip away. Iron can't hold and ropes can't tie a man with a brain and a heart like Sabin's. There's only one way to make sure of him. Shoot him down and carry the body in one of the wagons until we've come to the place where we're bound."

"What's the good of him dead, when he can be a real hostage living?" was the reasonable answer.

"We'll have the White Horse to show the Cheyennes," said Galway. "Who'll do this good turn for me? Who'll put a bullet through the brain of Rusty Sabin? Anyway, it ain't hardly more'n justice. He was likely to of been lynched back there in Witherell. He's only sort of getting what's coming to him. Buck, will you turn the trick for me?"

"Partner," said Buck, "maybe it's good policy, and I guess you're right, but I'd hate like hell to shoot a man that puts himself in trouble for the sake of a gal—only a half-breed gal, at that."

"Jimmy, will you do it?"

"Excuse me, captain. His eyes is too straight for me. I'd have to shoot crooked. My bullets wouldn't hit that kind of a man."

"Then I'll do it myself" said Galway. "Ay, and glad to, at that!"

He turned the head of his horse and rode straight towards his prisoner.

"Take the lariat off of him," he commanded. "Rusty, you're about to die. The White Horse can go on without you. But I won't have you die with your hands tied. Nobody can say that I ever killed a man whose hands were tied."

The Blue Bird, in her wagon, stared at the floor with sick, dizzy eyes. There was a smell of salty gunpowder in the air. Black grains of it rolled and jounced like living mites on the boards. And a big keg of it, newly broached, lay on its side.

She looked forward towards the driver of the wagon, and the man beside him. She looked back over the high tailboard.

The driver of the mules was lighting his pipe, now, and putting down the box of matches on the seat beside him.

She pulled the plug from the broached cask. There were half a dozen more of those casks piled in the end of the schooner. Now from the mouth of this one a steady stream of black began to pour. She went forward.

A CLOUD can steal unnoticed across the sky unless it passed the sun. And the hand of a clock moves unseen. But more slow and casual than that was the drifting of the Blue Bird towards the front of the wagon until her hand reached out and slipped the match box away.

The striking of the match rasped loudly on her ears, on her nerves. It caused the driver to jerk his head around.

"Hey!—Hey! What's up—Blue Bird, ah—God!"

He snatched out his revolver. The Blue Bird had dropped the match into the wide train of powder. She had intended to make a sacrifice of herself, willingly; not to save Rusty, but because life was worth-

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less to her after he had been betrayed through his fondness for her.

But when she saw the flare of the red burning powder, instinct made her move like a frightened cat. She leaped the tail-board of the wagon and past the noses of the mules just behind. A bullet from the driver's gun whirred past her head. Her feet struck the ground. She ran with all her might as a vast explosion roared behind her, picked her up, thrust her far forward.

She struck with a loose body—like a cat again—and rolled to her feet, still running. Behind her she dared not glance.

And Galway had been saying, as he rode at the side of Sabin: "The Indians won't notice the noise. The whites won't tell 'em. And so you'll die for nothing, Rusty. You that have been so damned big, you'll die like a mouse in the field. Sing out for your god, now! Sing out for Sweet Medicine and see if his medicine is worth a damn when you've got white men around you!"

Sabin lifted his freed hands. It was hard to drag the right one past the handle of the long-bladed knife at his belt. But what is a mere knife compared with the interposition of a god?

And he prayed: "Sweet Medicine, look down at me. Here am I among the white men again. But you have not forgotten me. See that with lies and deception they possess me. Therefore show the strength of your hand. Befriend me. Life is not sweet to me. Death would be easy, but for the sake of your own power and your fame among men—"

There the sky ripped apart and the earth shuddered. A whole wagon turned into a sheet of red flame. The wagons preceding and following were wrecked. Men were flung flat on the ground out of the saddles. Men walking were knocked over like ninepins.

But both Sabin and Galway kept their saddles. The shock of the explosion made Galway fire a random bullet into the air. He had no chance to fire again, for the gun was ripped from his hand by Red Hawk and a sixteen-inch blade of steel flashed like a sword towards the throat of Galway.

He threw up an arm to guard his life. But he was late, much too late. The last he saw of life was the strangely cold, calm face of Sabin, and then a red flash of agony as the blade swept through the tender flesh of the throat, deep, deep as the neckbone.

THROUGH the burning gap between the wagons, Sabin leaped the White Horse over the wreckage and rushed out into the open prairie; the dismal outcry of the men of the caravan seemed to diminish behind him, blown away into the past; but before him he saw the slender form of the Blue Bird running.

He understood, when he saw her, what had happened; and slowing the stallion, he called to her. She reached up; she leaped for his foot in the stirrup and he caught her with a strong arm. They galloped on.

"*Ah hai! Ah hai!*" he heard her say. "Let me die now—now—there would be no pain."

A sweeping charge of a hundred Cheyennes bore raging down towards them, aiming at the fatal gap in the line of the wagons. Once inside the magic of the circle, they would make short work of the whites. But Rusty felt a stirring of instinct and blood that made him shout and wave his arm. The charge halted, piled up in a confusion, as he cried: "Let them be! It was the work of the god, not of man. They are in the hands of Sweet Medicine. They will turn back. Do not touch them."

The shouting Cheyennes swerved around and around the caravan, but the word of their worker of miracles was not disobeyed. Not a single charge was pressed home.

And as the evening came on the reformed caravan was seen to turn and begin, slowly, the toilsome march back towards Witherell. With the death of their leader they had lost their goal.

Over the Indian camp, that night, there was a madness of delight. For the scouts kept bringing back word that the retreat of the white men continued. And in the

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morning the Cheyennes could start back towards their town strenghtened by the knowledge that a battle had been won for them by their god alone and the magic of Red Hawk. There was no sad or silent face among them except that of Running Elk, who sat cross-legged on the ground with his robe drawn over his head, unnoticed, powerless, despised by his tribe.

And the happiest of all those groups in the camp was, beyond a doubt, that little cluster of Lazy Wolf, Standing Bull, and the Blue Bird, with Maisry among them.

"But now what will come?" asked the Blue Bird. "Which of us two, Maisry? Which will he take?"

"Whoever he chooses," said Maisry, "there will be no hate left among us, will there, Blue Bird?"

"No," said the Indian girl. "But what will he do?"

They had to find him first, before they could tell. And he was nowhere to be seen. No doubt he was following with the scouts the train of wagons that journeyed back towards Witherell, to make sure that no mischief occurred between reds and whites.

And then, in the heart of the night, an Indian rode to the little campfire of the chief and spread on the ground his buffalo robe. On the bare hide words had been written in the hand of Rusty Sabin with charcoal.

To Maisry and the Blue Bird, to Lazy Wolf and to my brother, Standing Bull:

O my friends, where I go among you I bring sorrow. The redmen sharpen their knives against one another. The white men commit murder. No trust comes to me.

My own heart is divided, for if my right hand held that of Maisry, my left hand would go out to the Blue Bird. These things cannot be.

In the west there are tall, blue mountains, and blue is the color of heaven and of peace. I am traveling towards them. If I find wisdom and a quiet mind, I shall return to you again.

Farewell. My heart aches. My heart is colder than a winter morning. To die is no great sorrow; but it is not the will of the god that I should live among you. The red of my heart and the white of my skin have cursed me.

Pray for me. Offer sacrifice. Love one another. Farewell.

Red Hawk,
Rusty Sabin.

THE END

Luminous Frogs

ONE evening a French naturalist strolling on the beach was startled to find a frog which glowed brightly from stem to stern. Unable to hop, the frog could only crawl slowly. The scientist took it home and found that the frog was full of luminous bacteria. Later he was able to inoculate other frogs and fish, all of which glowed after a time. He was unable to breed a race of glowing frogs, however, because the bacteria made them unhealthy.

Luminous bacteria die at such a low temperature that no human being is likely to glow from this cause.

—*J. W. Holden.*

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The Men Who Make The Argosy

A Canadian Author

IF you were to ask R. V. Gery how come he emerged as a writer of adventure fiction, it might be difficult to get an answer out of him. He is a splendid example of one of those men in which a latent, suppressed urge breaks out comparatively late in a career that has included law, soldiering, schoolteaching and the like, in none of which the victim took any real interest whatever. At nineteen, in England, Gery was producing verse good enough to make highbrow publications.

Yet some ancient manuscripts, recently dug up, demonstrate that at that early period the beginnings of coherent fiction were in him as well.

So much for his beginnings.

And it was not until almost twenty years later that he submitted his first story to an editor. It clicked—as a matter of fact, it won a prize in a short story contest—much to the stupefaction of its writer. That was seven years ago, and since then fiction of various kinds has been his chief occupation, his bread and butter—occasionally his despair.

His recreations nowadays seem to be mainly writing the beginnings of stories and tearing them up again with muttered oaths. He resides in Toronto, is married, and appears to have convinced his wife that a fiction writer is barely possible to live with, temper or no. Most of his work is done between, through and under a cloud of inquisitive and vociferous offspring, which may account for a certain appalling facility in invective, displayed now and again by *Inspector Van Tromp,* one of Gery's characters.

Gery's only regret in the world is that he did not become a fiction writer away back in those nineteen-year-old days. "By now," as he puts it, "I might know something about it."—But we say he's far too modest.

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

The Author of "White Jade" Writes of Chinese Treasure

IN compiling the list of treasure found by Parker and Scott in the Yangtze, I have availed myself of poetic license and borrowed (for the purpose of authenticity in the description of the gems) from the will of the Dowager Empress, Tzu Hsi—"The Old Buddha"—leaning backward so as not to strain the credulity of the reader unacquainted with China.

The diary of a favorite eunuch, Li Lien-ying, says in part:

"Before the Empress was laid in the coffin the bottom was spread with a mattress of gold threads seven inches thick, in which was woven an embroidery of pearls. On top of the mattress was laid a silk coverlet strewn with a layer of pearls. In the pearl layer was a lace sheet of pearls into which was woven a figure of 'Old Buddha.' The head rested on jade lotus leaves, and the feet on jade lotus flowers. She was dressed in a ceremonial robe on which pearls were embroidered in gold thread, and over that an embroidery jacket with a rope of pearls; also a rope of pearls encircled her body nine times, and eighteen pearl images of Buddha were laid in her arms. A chaplet of pearls was placed on her head, and by her side were laid gold, jade and jeweled Buddhas to the number of one hundred and eight. On each side of the feet were placed one watermelon of jade, two sweet melons of jade, and gems in the shape of peaches, pears, apricots, dates . . . to the number of two hundred. By the left side was placed a gem shaped like a lotus root, with leaves and flowers sprouting from the top. On the right was a coral tree. . . . The interstices were filled with scattered pearls and gems until the whole was level."

Li engaged an expert to evaluate the contents, and has left a list from which I quote some of the principal items, estimated in pounds sterling.

"The gold mattress, £10,500. The pearls, rubies, sapphires, jades and emeralds with which it was interwoven, £112,000. The jade lotus leaf ornament of which the leaves were green and the veins natural, £106,250. The emerald lotus flower, which weighed nearly 37 Chinese ounces, £93,750. The rope of pearls containing 420 large, 1,000 medium, and 4,500 small pearls, £1,500,000. Three court necklaces, £306,500. The chaplet of pearls on the head (one weighing 4 ounces), £1,350,000. The two jade watermelons placed by the feet (they had green rind, red fruit and white seeds), £275,000. The gem lotus root placed at the left was three sections long, and from the top sprouted green lotus leaves and a white flower with a black corolla, £125,000. Finally, on the body were laid 500 large pearls, 1,000 medium and 2,200 smaller, besides

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2,200 sapphires, £228,750. A Manchu prince sent a gift of eight galloping horses and 18 Buddhist *lohan* made of jade, £100,000."

There is much more, which space and my conscience do not permit me to include. In view of the above it is scarcely to be wondered that Chinese revolutions are frequently financed by the looting of a single newly found grave.

ALFRED BATSON.

LOOKING AHEAD!

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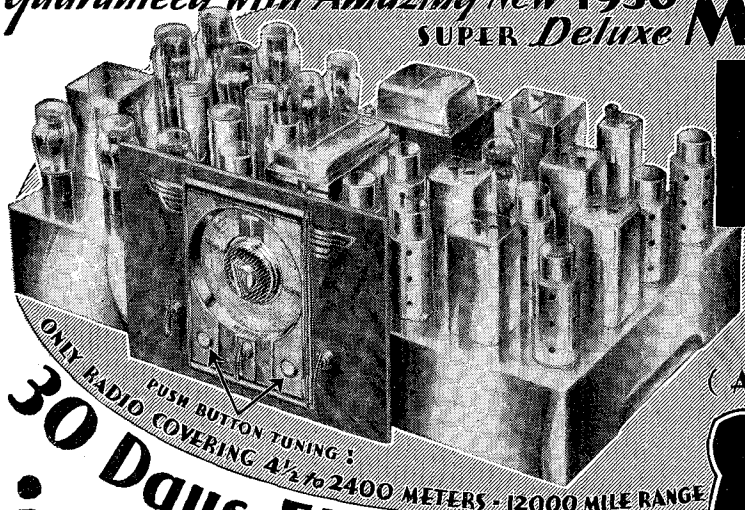

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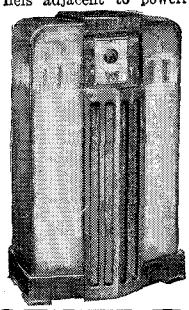

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